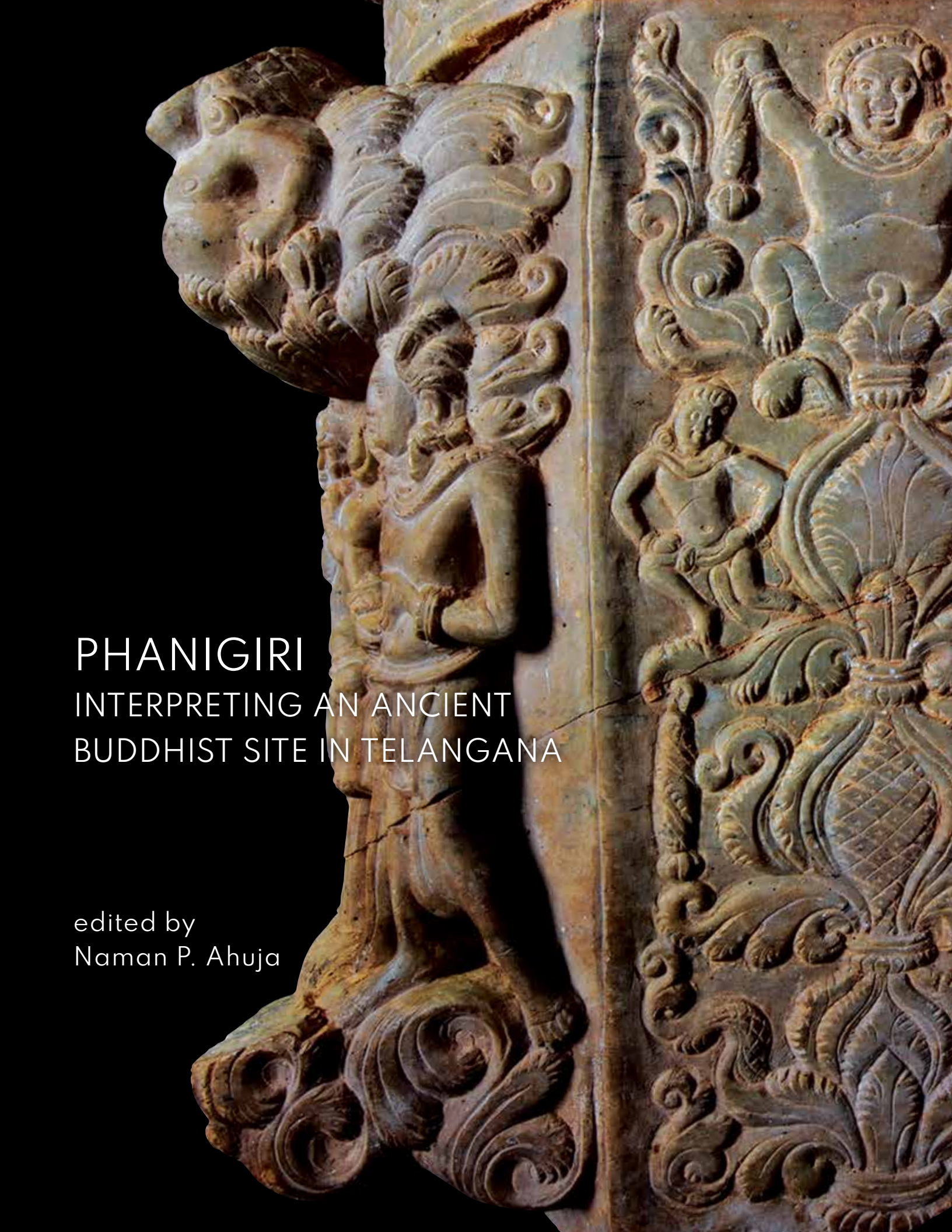

PHANIGIRI

INTERPRETING AN ANCIENT BUDDHIST SITE IN TELANGANA

edited by
Naman P. Ahuja

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

PHANIGIRI

The image on the cover focuses on a detail from a column (yashti) decorated with mithunas (loving couples) that rose above the mahastupa at Phanigiri like a finial. Beneath them, in the sacred dome of the stupa, there were once housed the sacred relics of a deceased monk. The auspicious energy of loving mithunas, traditionally placed at gateways and yashtis, served as a protective talisman. The erotic condition, whether in viraha (separation) or sanjog (union), has been frequently understood as being nearly as powerful as the divine one because of its single-mindedness. The intensity of its torments and pleasures are only quelled by death, of which the stupa was a reminder. This duality is reinforced by a line from Verse 349 of the *Gāthāsaptaśatī*, a collection composed by Hala, a 2nd-century Satavahana poet-king:

The ache
  Of separation
Ends
  But in death's
Diversions.

अण्णह ण तीरइ च्चिअ परिवड्ढन्त-गरुअं पिअअमस्स।
मरण-विणोएण विणा विरमावेउं विरह-दुक्खं॥

Hala's verses illuminate the many ways in which love opens the path to the self and knowledge. His poetry was composed in Maharashtri, the popular Prakrit vernacular of the Deccan at the time when Phanigiri was being constructed, and must have been heard by the ancient visitors to the site.

Translation by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, *The Absent Traveller: Prākrit Love Poetry from the Gāthāsaptaśatī of Sātavāhana Hāla*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2008, p. 29.
Cover image courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
Mithuna detail courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

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Front and Back Cover and Page 5
Details of decorative panels from the yashti fragment of the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

Page 2
A lion and a griffin, detail from an octagonal pillar in the Phanigiri sculpture shed. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
Stylistically (and, as attested to, epigraphically as well) Phanigiri belongs to the last phase of Satavahana patronage extending into the Ikshvaku period, that is from the very end of the 2nd and through the 3rd centuries AD. As the cover image shows, the sculptures have greater volume than what is seen in the early phase at Amaravati. Their conception is in higher relief and even three-dimensional, the figuration is taut and scenes are crowded. In their relief carvings, as can be seen here, the decorative borders and ornamentation comprise stylized floral motifs in patterns. Animals and makaras proliferate and, importantly, they continue and even develop the symbolism they had been associated with in earlier times.

Page 4
A devotee making an offering to the Buddha, detail from the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

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My profound gratitude goes to Peter Skilling (Bhadra Rujirathat) for the kindness and readiness with which he has shared his knowledge. It has been a privilege to be able to share my work with him.

I would like to thank B.V. Papa Rao, IAS retd., former Advisor to the Chief Minister of Telangana, for receiving, with readiness, the idea of producing a much-needed book on Phanigiri and allowing The Marg Foundation, Mumbai, to take up this project. The government of Telangana has encouraged a far-sighted view of developing the region's heritage and art for reasons greater than tourism alone. They wish to strengthen this approach by providing fresh information and insights through publications that are both scholarly and accessible to a wider public, and through ongoing participation in major international exhibitions and organization of conferences that give a platform for scholars from India and abroad to interact and share their work.

It was at one such conference held three years ago that I had the opportunity to present my own research on the relevance of Phanigiri's sculptures along with Parul Pandya Dhar, N.R. Visalatchy and John Guy who were also working on this site. It has been a pleasure to collaborate with them through this book and enrich each other's ideas. Some years prior to that (I think it was the winter of 2007–08), I travelled to the stupas and museums of this region with Akira Shimada, who had been a colleague when we were young postdoctoral employees at the British Museum in 2001, working under Robert Knox and expanding our knowledge of both Bannu in Gandhara and Amaravati in Telangana. We had visited the region independently as students prior to that in the 1990s; but travelling together gave us time to discuss a variety of issues. This book also gave us the chance to reconnect after all those years.

The support from different arms of the Telangana government has been instrumental and I must thank V. Srinivas Goud, the present Minister for Tourism and Culture, and Sreenivasa Raju IAS, M. Raghunandan Rao and B. Venkatesham who have each been Secretaries of Tourism and Culture. N.R. Visalatchy, former Director of the Department of Heritage Telangana, continues to work with the present management and has been instrumental in getting this project off the ground and seeing it to completion. Her guidance and the help provided by her department colleagues and staff, particularly Assistant Director V. Nagalaxmi, have enabled the team at Marg to access the collections, research and images required of the site.

Finally, at Marg, I would like to thank Radhika Sabavala and Almitra Billimoria for providing the initial impetus to this project, and everyone in the present team working under Rizio B. Yohannan, including Mrinalini Vasudevan, Naju Hirani, Gautam V. Jadhav and Savita Chandiramani, for seeing this book through. An extra thanks to my assistant, Avani Sood, who not just helped me with the research and editing, but kept it all together as I lost the protection of my turban to "death's diversions".

Naman P. Ahuja
October 2020

A devotee kneeling in front of a shrine, detail from a drum slab that once decorated the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

PREFACE

A jewel of a monastery was perched on a granite massif at Phanigiri. Phanigiri is in Telangana, about three hours away from Hyderabad, in a region that has been known for mining and forests. Mining is an old story in these parts—Kolar, only 200 km away in Guntur district, possesses some of the world's oldest and most famous diamond mines that date back to the reign of the Satavahanas. What was mined or made here in ancient times was traded via Arabia with the Roman Empire on one side and with Southeast Asia on the other. Trade in natural resources made the region exceptionally rich, and that wealth resulted in the construction of scores of elaborately carved stupas in the Early Historic Period, i.e. between the 2nd century BC and the 3rd century AD.

One afternoon in January 2020, during a visit to Phanigiri, I heard a distinct, substantial yet muffled explosion and I immediately wondered if it was a bomb blast. I was fairly sure that was what it was. But it was such a preposterous notion that I continued, unflinchingly, to ask the many questions I had of the hill. Poring over maps and drawings to try and make sense of the physical surrounds, I turned my attention to the construction history of the Buddhist monastery, the various access routes to the site, the numbers of people it may have accommodated and its water catchment areas. But slowly, I was diverted to the direction from where the sound of the blast had come. I could see a characteristic mushroom cloud of dust rising and figured it was dynamite. When I clarified this with my cohort, they confirmed that it was the granite and mineral-rich rocks of this region being blasted for mining.

Phanigiri and its environs are certainly on the precipice of an important change. Mining apart, the expansion of Hyderabad and the emergence of new highways will lead to the development of many new industries in the region, including tourism. Development, however, always comes at a price.[1] The changes that Phanigiri has witnessed over millennia make for an instructive story on "development", encompassing large religious and cultural shifts. How did the ancient communities that built the many megaliths in the area engage with the urban polities that grew around them in the late centuries BC? How did Buddhist culture coexist with other cultures in the region? The collapse of Roman trade via Alexandria/Berenike was replaced by revitalized networks with Southeast Asia; but did this shift operate through an apparatus of Hinduism alone? What happened to the region's Buddhists? While despoliation at the site of Phanigiri in Kakatiya times is evident, what do we know of the intervening period between the 3rd and 11th centuries AD? Did that phase see a gradual depopulation of the region? These are all questions to be asked of Phanigiri. But in this book we will limit ourselves to a study of the main structures and sculptures of the site that were constructed in the period from the 1st to the 4th century AD.

Remarkably, the infrastructure laid down then, and even before that, serves this society still. One water tank at the foot of Phanigiri hill is within a megalithic burial site; the water tank on the other side has a Hindu temple built on top of it.[2] Physically and chronologically, between the two lies the Buddhist vihara on the granite hill which is the focus of this book. The villages in the area have carved out sustainable

NOTES

1 Aloka Parasher Sen has written on the results of a study conducted over the past six to seven years which charts the disappearance of archaeological habitats in and around Hyderabad. Aloka Parasher Sen, "Documenting Heritage of Localities around Hyderabad: Issues and Challenges", July 2018, http://esocialsciences.org/Articles/ShowPDF/A2018726143957_19.pdf (accessed on February 20, 2020). Her succinct summary on how sites in the region need to be interpreted is presented through a case study of Kondapur (around 175 km from Phanigiri) in an article called "Unraveling the Reality of a 'City' on the Deccan Plateau", in *Urban Dreams and Realities: Remains and Representations of the Ancient City*, edited by Adam Kemezis, Leiden: Brill, 2015, pp. 89–107.

2 Julia Shaw has worked extensively on Indian landscape, ecology and dams. See J. Shaw, "Landscape, Water and Religion in Ancient India", *Archaeology International*, Vol. 9 (2005), pp. 43–48; J. Shaw, J.V. Sutcliffe, L. Lloyd-Smith, J.L. Schwenninger and M.S. Chauhan, with contributions by E. Harvey and O.P. Misra, "Ancient Irrigation and Buddhist History in Central India: Optically Stimulated Luminescence and Pollen Sequences from the Sanchi Dams", *Asian Perspectives*,

livelihoods for themselves by respectfully using the resources provided by the natural ecosystem and by harnessing its capacities for water generation and sanitation. A study of Phanigiri's sculpted narratives, landscape and settlement context provide us with a case study of how this space and its people have evolved over the years.

Marg has played an important role in the documentation of India's archaeological, ecological and living heritage since the late 1940s, and its publications have provided blueprints for development as well as for what has been called "nation-building". Today, corporates, private enterprises and international agencies work with local administration and state governments in a "liberalized" economy that seems a far cry from the one in which Mulk Raj Anand, the founder-editor of Marg, initiated a publishing programme "in praise" of the heritage of different Indian sites. Each region's cultural identity warranted acknowledgement and the sum of the parts added up to a broader vision of the celebration of the nation's pluralism.[3] The publications also aimed to usher in a revitalization of traditional crafts and local economies at the grassroots level to help them stay relevant and endure in the midst of the growing tides of globalization. This volume hopes to keep alive that original spirit of Marg with its primary goal of documenting and bringing attention to Phanigiri through knowledge that will be useful to those who live there and work for its benefit.

Although, for the ease of readability, the diacritical marks used for Sanskrit words have been removed (except when they are in quotations or titles of publications), in most cases words have been spelt according to their nearest Romanized pronunciation and as they would be for English speakers. For transliteration, we have used *ch* for *c* (e.g. chaitya instead of caitya), *sh* for both *ś* and *ṣ* (e.g. Shiva instead of Śiva), *ri* for ṛ (e.g. Krishna instead of Kṛṣṇa); *ā* has been kept as *a* and *ī* as *i* (e.g. Mahādevī as Mahadevi), *ṃ* as *m* (e.g. Theravaṃsa as Theravamsa), *ṇ* as *n* (e.g. puṇya as punya) and *ṭ* as *t* (e.g. Dhanyakaṭaka as Dhanyakataka). We have also used Sanskrit words instead of Pali and, to avoid confusion, have refrained from presenting them in the variety of Prakrit accents as would have been used among different classes, communities or regions in ancient India. At the same time, however, readers will find that this volume elects not to subsume BC and AD within a Western Christian hegemony of calling those eras by the name of BCE and CE. As writers and publishers that believe in respecting difference, cultures must be allowed to retain their calendars. We can each surely learn to measure our time against another's, with the awareness of what we are doing. But enforcing someone's measure of time by assuming a name that makes it "common" to all, robs each of the opportunity to know whose calendar we are using. Finally, this book has chosen to use the more accurate "bodhisatva" over the ubiquitous "bodhisattva", following the instructive advice of Gouriswar Bhattacharya and Pratapaditya Pal which Marg has followed for many years.

Naman P. Ahuja
October 2020

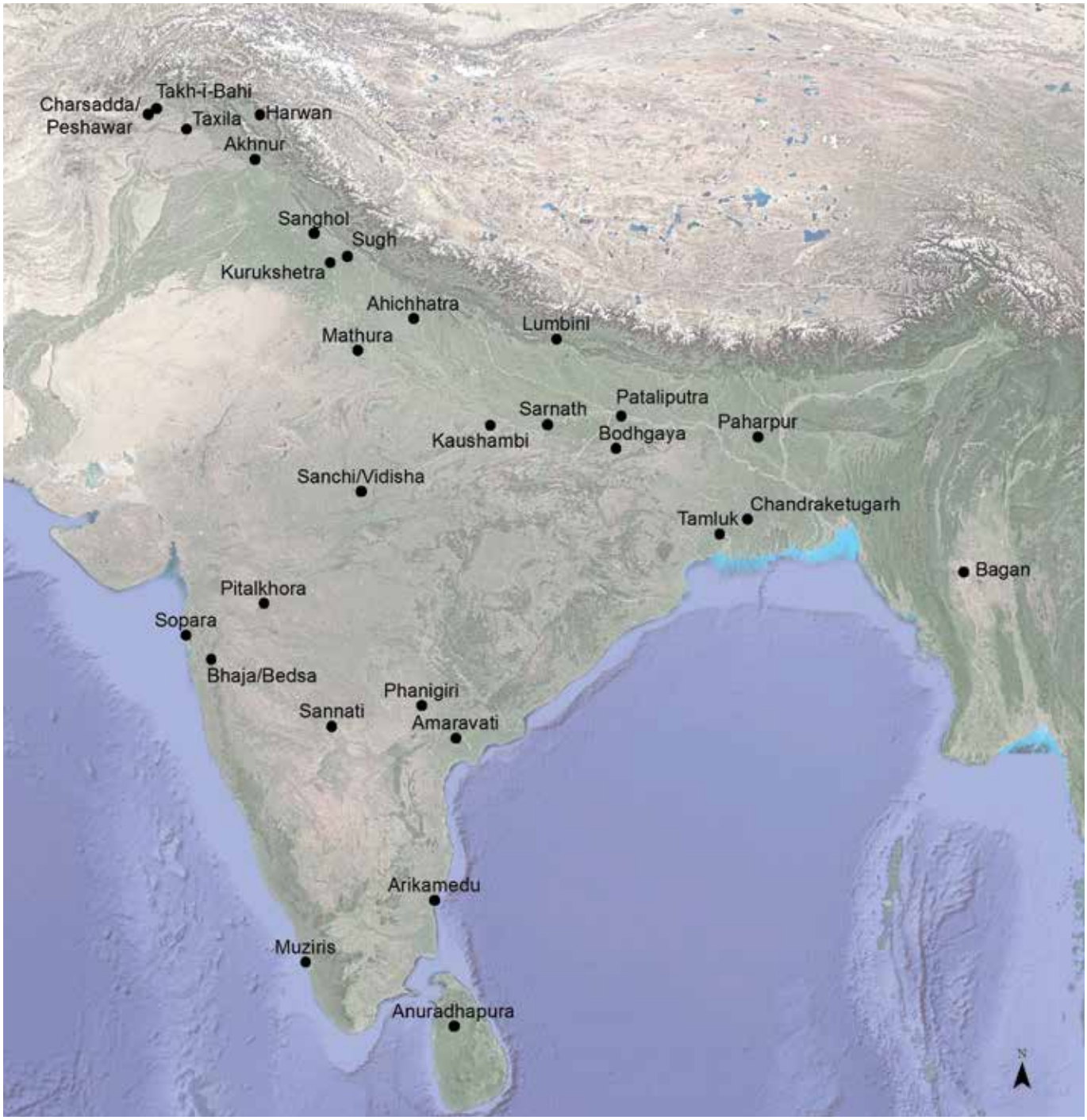
Vol. 46, No. 1 (2007), pp. 166–201; J. Shaw and J.V. Sutcliffe, "Water Management, Patronage Networks and Religious Change: New Evidence from the Sanchi Dam Complex and Counterparts in Gujarat and Sri Lanka", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2003), pp. 73–104; J. Shaw, J.V. Sutcliffe and E. Brown, "Historical Water Resources in South Asia: The Hydrological Background", *Hydrological Sciences Journal–JOURNAL DES SCIENCES HYDROLOGIQUES*, Vol. 56, No. 5 (2011), pp. 775–88.

3 Annapurna Garimella has perceptively noted that "Marg was concerned intimately with the study and assessment of modern India's artistic heritage, often linking this history to those of emergent Asian nation-states…" From *Mulk Raj Anand: Shaping the Indian Modern*, edited by Annapurna Garimella, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2005. She mentions later in the same volume how state governments sponsored certain Marg issues. For example, Chief Minister Bansi Lal's government sponsored a 1974 magazine on Haryana, a state that needed to carve out an identity for itself, a task Telangana is confronted with now.

The site of Phanigiri is en route to the grand emporia of Amaravati, Dharanikota, Nagapattinam and Arikamedu in the south, and Kalinga, Tamluk and Chandraketugarh further northeast. These coastal towns were no doubt also connected by maritime waterways to Sri Lanka, Thailand and thence to Indonesia and even as far as the Mekong delta in Vietnam. Like Phanigiri's connection with India's famous ports, inside those continents too, trade with the cities in the hinterlands was dependent on routes through forests. These forests were controlled and the polities that spread within them used religious apparatuses which have left monumental evidence of their control. The growing urbanization in the post-Mauryan period saw a widespread development of sites all through the northwest frontier, the north Indian plains as well as using the southeast Indian coast to trade with Southeast Asia—each was part of a networked numismatic economy trading against bullion. Yet for all the urbanization that the regions experienced, their denizens were also nomadic pastoralists who coexisted with traders and wandering monks in their midst.

Maps on pp. 11–13 are drawn to scale and are courtesy Telangana State Remote Sensing Applications Centre (TRAC).

Ancient Sites of South Asia: Mostly Buddhist



Phanigiri in the Context of the Deccan

Phanigiri and its Environs

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Naman P. Ahuja

Phanigiri, in Telangana, is one of the most important ancient Buddhist sites in India. The exceptional quality of its sculptures and the remarkable nature of its compact but exquisite little monastery have prompted questions on what led to its rise and decline, the type of Buddhism that was practised here and how it relates to Amaravati, Sannati (Kanaganahalli), Nagarjunakonda and the other well-known sites of the Deccan region that were active at the same time. This book allows us to see Phanigiri as a site that was aesthetically complex and comparable to those found at the more renowned ancient Buddhist complexes of Andhradesha which have set a benchmark for studies on not just Indian Buddhism but the entire discipline of Indian art history.

The rediscovery of Phanigiri and its materials comes at a time when there have been major shifts and advancements in our understanding of the history of Buddhism. We know which narratives had grown popular enough to be carved in stone at most Buddhist religious sites, and this book elaborates on why and how those were worshipped. This revised perspective also lets us place the history and objects of Phanigiri within the larger context of a plural south India with its well-developed networks set up by agriculturalists, merchants, forest-keepers and guilds of professionals. We know of connections between this land and places as far afield as the wider Roman world on one side, and Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia on the other. The latter were significantly impacted by the rich and powerful proselytizing monasteries of Telangana and Andhra.

Studies that compare carvings of mythical narratives at different stupa sites can suggest what variations in emphasis were being communicated at each site, and, at times, even which Buddhist sects and religious practices were more popular at these places. Traditionally, this analysis has been endeavoured largely on the basis of the occasional names of sects or deities mentioned in stone or copper inscriptions. The most important inscription on an octagonal pillar found in a near-perfect state at Phanigiri records donations made at the time of King Rudrapurushadatta of the Ikshvaku dynasty (figures 1.22 and 1.23). While most of the inscription is in Sanskrit, the last few lines are in Prakrit. Was this bilingualism to appeal to different types of visitors? Other inscriptions at Phanigiri inform us about festivals, constructions and renovations within the site. The monk Dhammasena, we are told, erected a flower canopy over the umbrella on the stupa, while another group of monks, it seems, received a donation of gold coins to keep a flame burning in perpetuity. The inscriptions may be few, but they tell us what Buddhists *did* at the site, which is rare. They also tell us that this must, indeed, have been a jewel of a site. This cultural and religious landscape is laid out in chapter 2 of this book by Peter Skilling. He reveals that the specific literary sources that could have thrown further light on early Buddhist traditions in Andhradesha have unfortunately been lost and thus there is a greater onus on visual and epigraphic evidence to inform us about the nature of worship at sites like Phanigiri.

The text of the inscription from the reign of Rudrapurushadatta also celebrates the virtuousness of the donor who did not succumb to the power of the mighty Shiva or Vishnu and elected to serve the dharmachakra of Buddhism instead. It thus acknowledges an environment where sectarianism and competition between faiths existed. This provides an important window to the changing religious worldview in the region at that time.

Older scholarship on Buddhist art was fixated on studying relief narratives to solve questions about the origin of the Buddha image. The presence of the image

Previous pages
1.1 Aerial view of the monastic complex at Phanigiri hill. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. This serpentine "S" shaped lay of the land lends its name to the site and the monastery established here: Phanigiri, the hill (giri) in the shape of a phana (serpent's hood). The region is arid but harvests rainwater in large reservoirs. At the time when the spectacular terraced monastic complex was built, this was a rapidly expanding agricultural landscape where an older megalithic society was transforming into a monetized, wealthy, globally connected one.

was thought to be a marker of the growing influence of the Mahayana school, and a kind of clear divide between aniconism and iconism was accompanied with debates on whether the images at Mathura came before the ones at Gandhara and whether the ones at Amaravati predated those at either of these places. One of the more significant shifts in recent scholarship has been the realization that too much emphasis has perhaps been given to this question and it has overdetermined our understanding of Buddhist art which has been all too simplistically divided into Theravada and Mahayana. Neither was there just one way of representing Siddhartha, the bodhisatva or Gautama Buddha, nor did aniconism stop being a part of Indian art even as there was the parallel rise of iconic images within different religious pantheons. Once we look past these older frameworks, we start asking other questions about the rationale for the selection of the narratives and whom they served.[1] Chapter 3 in the book by John Guy provides an overview of this by studying the dating and iconography of the sculptural remains at Phanigiri.

The next two chapters by N.R. Visalatchy and Akira Shimada are concerned with the site's archaeology and where its structures and sculptures once fitted.

1.2 One of the water reservoirs surrounding the hill at Phanigiri. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.
The history of the site is not limited to its Buddhist legacy under the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus, but can be traced back several centuries earlier. Two circles of rocks, that are actually cairns containing megalithic period cists, lie at the base of this pond and resurface when the water dries up in the summer months. They were partially excavated a few years ago and the contents were found to be similar to remains from nearby megalithic burial sites such as Peraboinagudem, Addaguduru, Raigir and Bhongir (written as Bhuvanagiri in Telugu and Sanskrit).

The ladder-camera-stand while the photograph shown below was being taken. Mahomed Beg to the right.

Cist exposed and photographed from the ladder-camera-stand. The pots outside the cist are in bad condition when compared with the average for Raigir. Roof-stones intact but clumsy.

Iron Age and Early Historic Period megalithic burial sites in Telangana and Tamil Nadu are dated between 800 BC and 200 AD. Several of these have been found near Phanigiri. The archival photographs (with their labels) shown here come from the collection of Dr E.H. Hunt, a medical officer fascinated by archaeology, whose collections and archives are preserved at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. These sites demonstrate that the habit of burying either a whole body or excarnated remains was already current in the societies that began to build stupas. What other cultural traits did they bring with them to Buddhism? Was the love of the forest, the awareness of yakshas and respect for nagas their legacy? It is hard to assess this as the burials rarely contain figurines or imagery that could have illuminated this. Equally hard is arriving at a date for so-called megalithic cultures. They do however contain both copper and iron tools and reveal something of pre-existing societies that began to follow Buddhist teachings.

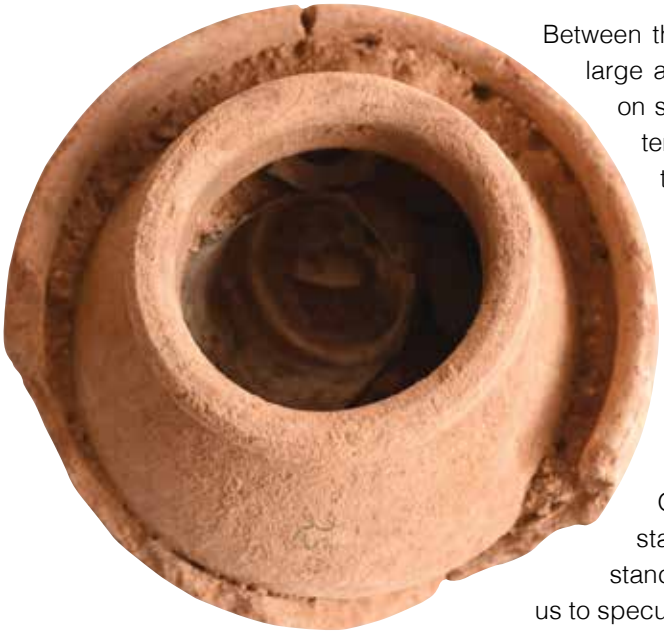
Excavations have revealed a monastic complex built around, and largely beside, a mahastupa, from which a terracotta relic pot containing a silver casket with bits of silver and gold foil and beads was excavated (figure 1.6). The complex includes two large and two small apsidal halls, the remains of a grand torana gateway, 150 cells along the perimeter, and the unusual base of an octagonal structure that may have been a smaller stupa or some other kind of shrine (cf. figures 4.7–4.10). Other monastic buildings include three viharas, each containing nine cells. The constructed site is located right on top of an S-shaped hill, like a jewel in the hood of a serpent (figure 1.1). The stupa has a view commanding the entire region; or, to put it in better perspective, it was the focus of this region, a constant reminder of its protection. It is 18 m in diameter and has a platform in each of the four cardinal directions. Each of these is about 4 x 1.25 m and must have originally supported ayaka pillars, as is indicated by the five surviving broken limestone stumps on the western platform (cf. figure 4.32). The pair of smaller apsidal halls stand side by side on the east between the mahastupa and the octagonal shrine in Zone 3. Three carved pairs of footprints (Buddhapadas) were in front of these apsidal halls while a fourth one was once on a brick platform in front of one of the larger apsidal temples in Zone 1 (cf. figures 2.6–2.9). Even as these symbolically (or aniconically) reference the Buddha, complete with the mahapurushalakshana, the remains of iconic statues of the Buddha have also been found at the site.

Trying to identify which sculpture came from precisely which location and thus interpreting what significance it held is hampered by two factors. The site seems to have been actively disturbed in antiquity itself; so when it was discovered in 1942, many of the objects were found clustered in one location. Then it was disturbed again in the period between 1948–2003, during which time only two proper rounds of excavation took place even though there was a noteworthy growth in scholarship on the region. There has always been a demand for Satavahana- and Ikshvaku-style images, which even resulted in attempted pilfering at the site. The remains were hastily put back together after some initial rounds of excavations and the photographs taken of the reconstructed site are thus also misleading. The contributors to this book have gone back to the original field notes of the Department of Archaeology to offer a corrective, so that future scholarship is aware of these existing issues. Unlike Amaravati whose assets have been largely divided between the Chennai and British Museums, Phanigiri's sculptures mostly remain on the site and there are fresh excavations still being carried out. This allows us a chance to re-evaluate the speculated arrangement of the site as well as carry out more contextualized research here.

Visalatchy's essay in this book shows that in ancient times, visitors to Phanigiri probably entered from the south, climbing up the precipitous cliff on steps that brought them to the mahastupa. The wooden staircase must have broken and eroded away centuries ago, and the holes are now filled with soil from which a series of bushes (mostly Calatropis or Euphorbia cactoids) grow along the rock. There appears to be another entrance between the row of cells on the eastern perimeter. One now enters the site from the north, between the backs of two large gajaprishtha apsidal chaityas. Our approach and experience today is therefore quite contrary to that of an ancient pilgrim or tourist. Orientation also makes a difference to how we interpret the structures. A 24-columned brick hall is in front of the two large apsidal temples. This building, when viewed the other way, need not have been only a vihara but may have served as a congregational mandapa in front of the two chaitya shrines.

1.3 Terracotta funeral urn with other pots and vessels unearthed from a megalithic period burial site near Annapanadi, Madurai. Source: Naman P. Ahuja, *Art and Archaeology of Ancient India: Earliest Times to the Sixth Century*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2018, p. 27.

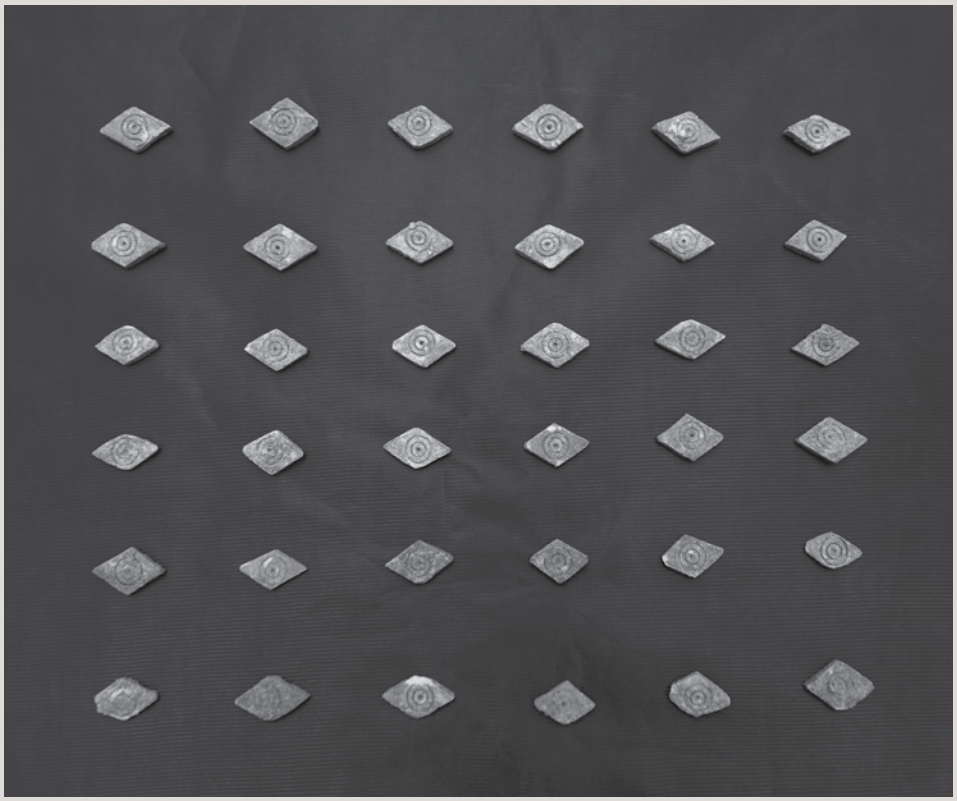
1.4 and 1.5 E.H. Hunt excavating megalithic burial sites in Telangana. Source: Naman P. Ahuja, *Art and Archaeology of Ancient India*, p. 26.



Between these two zones (i.e. the main stupa in Zone 4 and the two large apsidal shrines in Zone 1) is an area with various structures on split levels. It contains the remains of the two smaller apsidal temples, the torana, a memorial pillar, the octagonal shrine (or the base of a "bell"-shaped stupa on an octagonal platform) and another multi-celled brick vihara.

While limestone finds plentiful use in Phanigiri, there is also some amount of stucco work that survives which points to a comparison between this complex and contemporaneous sites in Gandhara that used similar material, such as the well-preserved Takht-i-Bahi. Both would have been active at the same time and perched on hilltops at two diagonally opposite ends of the subcontinent. One wonders if the many cells in Phanigiri also contained statues like Takht-i-Bahi? Some stucco heads and one free-standing stucco sculpture have been found in ways that permit us to speculate about such a correlation (cf. figures 3.18, 4.16, 4.35 and 4.36). The presence of substantial sculptures of stucco and terracotta have, regrettably, been insufficiently researched in the Satavahana realm.[2] After all, their contemporaries in Kushana Gandhara specialized in covering entire stupas and monasteries in sculptures made of this material. The monasteries in the Deccan, including Maharashtra and Telangana, were certainly connected with the ones in Gandhara: they reveal common concerns; one region acknowledges people from the other in inscriptions, even though each employed different styles of art. Gandharan stucco sculptures have survived much better because the region gets little rain. At Phanigiri, as elsewhere in the Deccan, the most fragile of the stucco images, and painted surfaces (whether on stucco or stone), have perished. As stucco is much more cheaply made than stone, one must now imagine many other parts of stupas, caves and viharas being clad with painted clay sculptures, significantly enhancing our understanding of how the site once looked.

While on the subject of the overall aesthetic effect of Phanigiri, one must also try and imagine what the elevation of this complex was like. In the chapters that follow, authors describe how the grand hemispherical mahastupa marked one end of the site, and two large apsidal temples the opposite end. In between was a terraced area with smaller shrines, free-standing pillars as well as pillared halls, which, as just speculated, may have been for congregations. Visalatchy discusses the foundations, plinths and walls of these mandapas or viharas: their substantial scale, weight and width are explicable as there was otherwise no real soil in which to embed the constructions. The site sits, after all, on a massive rock of granite. She also highlights how the halls are slightly unusual in that the central four pillars have prominence, which can lead to a reasonable assumption that the central shrines were perhaps roofed differently. They might have been seats for leading pontiffs in congregations, or perhaps even housed images that were accessible from all sides. These distinct designs along with the site's tight composition on split levels (with terraces, staircases, balustrades and multiple chaityas abutting the mahastupa) allow it to serve as an important hallmark of what Andhra Buddhist complexes may have been like in the late 3rd–early 4th centuries AD. This is a critical period, just prior to the efflorescence of Hindu temples, and a site like Phanigiri provides a vital link between the aesthetics of the two.



1.6 The earthen pot containing the silver relic casket, excavated from the mahastupa at Phanigiri. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

1.7 Carved shell beads excavated from the megalithic burial sites of Narmeta, Nanganur and Siddipet in Telangana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

1.8 and 1.9 Red and black-ware pottery, among E.H. Hunt's finds from the megalithic burial sites at Bhongir and Raigir. Accession Numbers: (left) EAX.7440 and (right) EAX.2413. Courtesy Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

The larger urns in megalithic burials can contain human remains, but the more utilitarian red- and black-ware pots must have been filled with offerings to serve the spirit in the afterlife. The presence of precious items such as carved beads recovered from urns in sites such as Narmeta, Nanganur and Siddipet in Telangana is exceptional. In time, earthen pots were used to house the relics and ashes of the venerable and were buried in stupas. An example of this is the one found at Phanigiri.

The placement of mithunas, yakshas and ganas in the early Buddhist monuments of Andhradesha allow us to see how similar ideas were absorbed into later temples.

1.10 Detail of a decorative panel with ganas from the yashti fragment of the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

There are other elements that hint at how the conventions of early Hindu temples were borrowed from Buddhist shrines. Ananda Coomaraswamy and more recently, Michael Meister, have observed that several aspects of Hindu temples are found depicted on older Buddhist reliefs.[3] The study of semi-divine figures like ganas and mithunas also suggest continuities (figures 1.10–1.12). Their presence on the doorways of Buddhist shrines as well as on yashti pillars facing the four major directions will be elaborated by John Guy in his chapter. There is a substantial variety of mithuna depictions in the art of the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus in the Deccan. These couples are also found in the Buddhist art of Gandhara and there is little doubt therefore that they had become part and parcel of the wider iconographic programme of Buddhism by the 3rd century.

Who were the people who originally visited Phanigiri and financed this complex? As discussed by Akira Shimada in his chapter, donative inscriptions are found all

over the stupas in this region and provide the names and professions of people associated with them. Most major stupas (whether Jain or Buddhist) were built on trade routes. Research at sites like Amaravati has shown that both the pious and commercial classes of the city of Dharanikota were its patrons. Perhaps it is possible to start constructing a complex geographic relationship between towns, their monastic settlements and the agricultural countryside at Phanigiri as well. Ancient reservoirs and canals transformed this arid region into a prosperous land capable of sustaining lucrative commercial ties with Southeast Asia and the Roman world for centuries. Phanigiri is east of the Musi river that flows southward from the highlands of Andhra Pradesh and joins the Krishna river, along which are Buddhist sites such as Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Bhattiprolu, Jaggayyapeta and Ghantasala. These ruins were discovered during the colonial period; but Phanigiri, perhaps because it was rather inland, was not given much attention then. On the northeastern side,

1.11 Detail of a mithuna couple from the yashti fragment of the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

1.12 Four-sided pillar with mithunas from Nagarjunakonda, 3rd–4th century AD (Ikshvaku period). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1986.502.1).

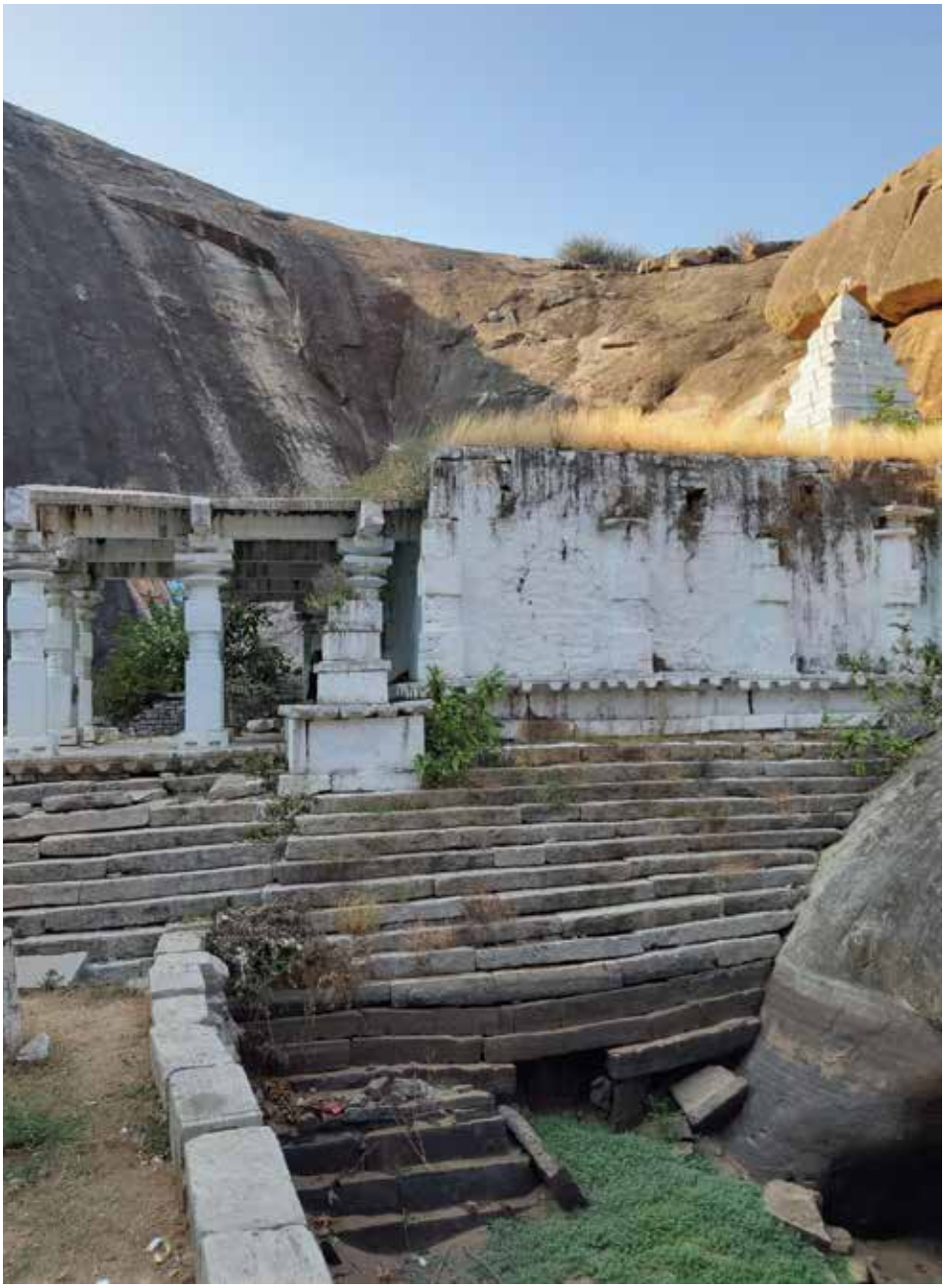
1.13–1.16 Damaged statues of the Buddha and bodhisatvas found in Phanigiri. Figures 1.13 and 1.14: Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja. Figure 1.15: Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Figure 1.16: Courtesy Peter Skilling.

The style of Buddha carvings on reliefs in most ancient sites of the Deccan compares well with the region's contemporaneous three-dimensional sculptures. Whereas the largest statues of standing Buddhas tend to be like shallow steles with flat backs, smaller scale statues, whether of the Buddha or mithunas, were created in the round. Sculptures of bodhisatvas began to be carved at some sites after the 3rd century AD. This is the period to which we date the free-standing statues of the Buddha that have been found at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda; some are smaller than life size, others are indicative of the shift towards gigantic images which had started to be made in other regions of Andhradesha. There were also colossal images of the Buddha being created in distant lands associated with the Kushanas which simultaneously saw the emergence of theistic practice.

These developments in Buddhist art can be connected to other parallel movements in the religious imagery of South Asia. Amongst Brahmanical deities, there was a move towards theistic worship in Gudimallam as there was in Mathura, and these representations may have impacted the Buddhist sites that existed nearby. Here, we notice a sharing of ideas between these major centres of Buddhism—Amaravati, Mathura and Gandhara. Finally, these Buddha statues of the Deccan also share an important connection with the earliest statues of the Buddha in Sri Lanka.

The statues featured here throw light on the scale and style of large sculpted Buddha and bodhisatva figures excavated at Phanigiri. Many of these statues were damaged, perhaps even deliberately smashed, which indicates that the monastery suffered a violent attack at some point, before or after it was abandoned.

at the foot of Phanigiri hill, lies a cluster of megalithic burial sites; their finds are similar to ones excavated from other such sites in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (figures 1.3–1.5 and 1.7–1.9). This causes one to speculate if the river valley had been a natural route since prehistoric times. The river would have had much more water that supported the surrounding forests and large settlements. Like many of the other major rivers of India, the Krishna and even some of its larger tributaries were once navigable. While the soil of the region remains dry, the site of Phanigiri is still surrounded by lush green fields of paddy, the cultivation of which has been made possible by a number of reservoirs and wells used for irrigation (figure 1.2). Jowar (millet) and cotton is what normally grows in these parts, and rice in the areas closest to the waterbodies.



1.17–1.19 A Kakatiya-period Vaishnav temple and other painted Hindu rock carvings at Phanigiri. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.
The temple was constructed over a substantial tank that lies in one of the curving crooks of the hill. Apart from the water that is protected, or separated and maintained under the temple, there are ghat-like steps that allow the public to access another connected tank. There is also a well in use nearby. The provision for water harvesting at Phanigiri is evidently at least as old as the megalithic period.

The value of the heritage of Phanigiri does not lie merely in its possession of some of ancient India's finest sculptures; it also contains knowledge and evidence of a capacity to live within a very ancient habitat, of learning how to work with natural resources of water and forests. This resource has attracted new governmental outposts over millennia, even as the region has learnt not to depend on external resources as much as it can reuse its own. It is this feature that needs showcasing in the development of the site even as others in the region uncritically accept and undergo a revitalization through religious tourism or pilgrimage. Will contemporary culture, reliant on the spectacle enabled by our museums, harness digital power and other technologies of simulation to create a hyperreal heritage site that has as much relevance and appeal for local people as it does for foreign pilgrims, tourists and scholars? The danger of making the place and local specificity redundant is always high when heritage development plans take over.

There is a substantial amount of work still to be done at this 16-acre government protected site. The depredations suffered by its buildings and sculptures in antiquity have been compounded by our neglect in the past 100 years. The Department of Heritage Telangana has started conservation and re-excavation in stages; however, a portion of Phanigiri still remains completely unexplored and several broken sculptures need to be put back together (figures 1.13–1.16; cf. figures 7.20–7.22). The larger sculptures from the site have been transferred on tractors and brought down to a mid-20th century house that the Department of Archaeology has rented from a notable family in the village. A nearly life-size male figure that may be a bodhisatva (or, less likely, a yaksha) was found in the more recent excavations. It was in a cell between the two small apsidal chapels in Zone 3 that were accessed via steps to the west of the octagonal shrine which would have brought people up. These steps aren't visible anymore, though parts of a balustrade survive. Grand long mouldings still peep out of the overgrown grass, as do the remains of long monolithic dressed pillars of limestone. Fragments from the torana and the sculpted top of a memorial

pillar celebrating Siddhartha's turban sacrifice have also been found in a courtyard in this area (cf. figures 6.2 and 7.17). The torana architraves were shifted to the village storehouse, but the turban stele was small enough to be transported to the Government Museum in Hyderabad. The torana is the focus of Parul Pandya Dhar's study in the chapter 6 of this book (cf. figures 6.8 and 6.9). Analysing its surviving sections, she attempts to piece together the design of the original structure, the purpose it would have served as a sacred gateway, and the narratives that would have adorned its three bowed architraves of limestone.

How should we approach our inheritance of this ancient heritage? In the last chapter of the book, I examine the turban stele and its story as a metaphor for the larger goals to be kept in mind with regard to the preservation of this precious site. The sculpture certainly makes us wonder whose relics may have been interred below it (if it was a memorial) or whose self-sacrifice was celebrated at Phanigiri. It tells the story of Siddhartha casting away his princely turban (cf. figure 7.2). The sacrifice of materiality opened doors to knowledge sharing and enlightenment for Siddhartha as much as it holds similar potential for us now. It also provokes us to think about where we stand today in the field of museum studies, the dissemination of research, the purpose of curation, conservation and the ethics of heritage management. This chapter concludes the book with questions on the relevance of Phanigiri and what perspectives need to be factored in the forthcoming and inevitable development of this complex. The building of new infrastructure in the region and the presence of international organizations and consulates in Hyderabad now regulate the flows of labour to add to the flourishing trade networks which have already existed here for the past many decades. What will be the changed outlook of the people who live here? How different will their requirements be from older patterns of globally connected urbanization? I close with these concerns, and also by highlighting the lessons that can be learnt from the historiography of Amaravati. The stories of the despoliation, conservation, documentation and museumization of the latter have bearing on what will be done at Phanigiri.

Perhaps, it is premature to produce a book about a site, half of which is still to be excavated. However, it speaks to the times—the politics involved in the destruction of archaeological spaces, their appropriation by various communities, and the export of their artefacts from local sites to international museums. It is against this scholarly context that Phanigiri needs to be presented. As research will no doubt deepen, we may get further insights into when and why this site was abandoned. There may even be greater consensus amongst some of the divergent views held by the authors in this volume. However some questions will no doubt remain. How could a community no longer find value in a space which had sustained it for so many years and in whose waters and forests they had found guardian deities and benevolent spirits? An exploration of the hill reveals that elements from the Satavahana site were appropriated to build the Kakatiya-period temples about 700 years after the stupa and monasteries were constructed. The Phanigiri massif has a precipitous drop on its southern side, at the base of which sits the Ramalaya, a temple which covers a large water tank (figures 1.17–1.19). Beyond it is a well and a lotus pond, beside which is a garage for the temple's chariot. While the temple itself is a Kakatiya construction, there is no doubt that the tank it sits on is much older. Remains from the Buddhist complex were also commandeered to construct the Shivalaya at Phanigiri. Studies until now have not focused on the process of abandonment, disuse and reuse the site's structures where subjected to. Much of

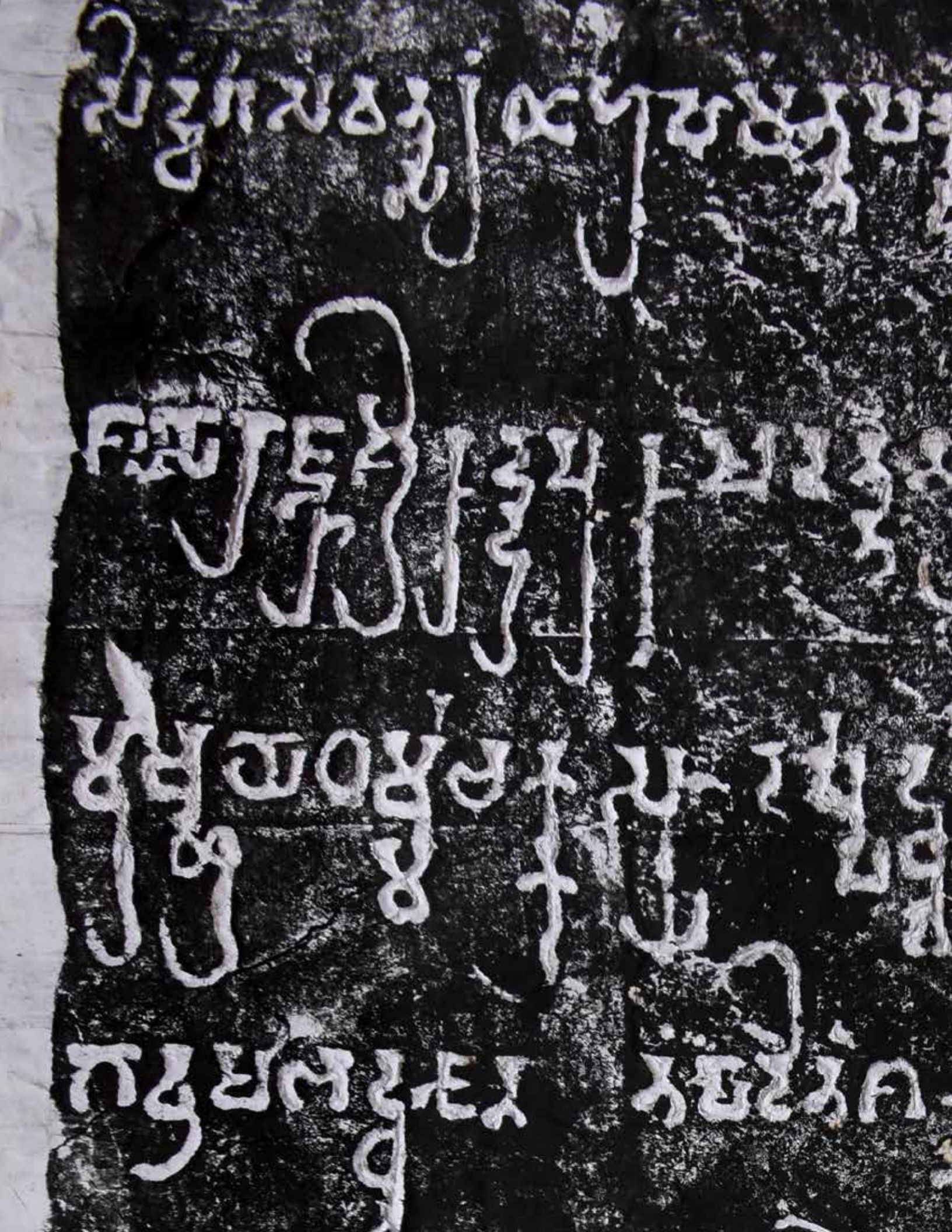
this evidence appears to have just eroded away. Matters are made more complicated by the fact there are some large limestone pieces found at the site that appear to have not been carved at all—making it plausible that the site had elements that were unfinished even when it was abandoned. These and other questions will continue to draw researchers back to snake-hooded hill.

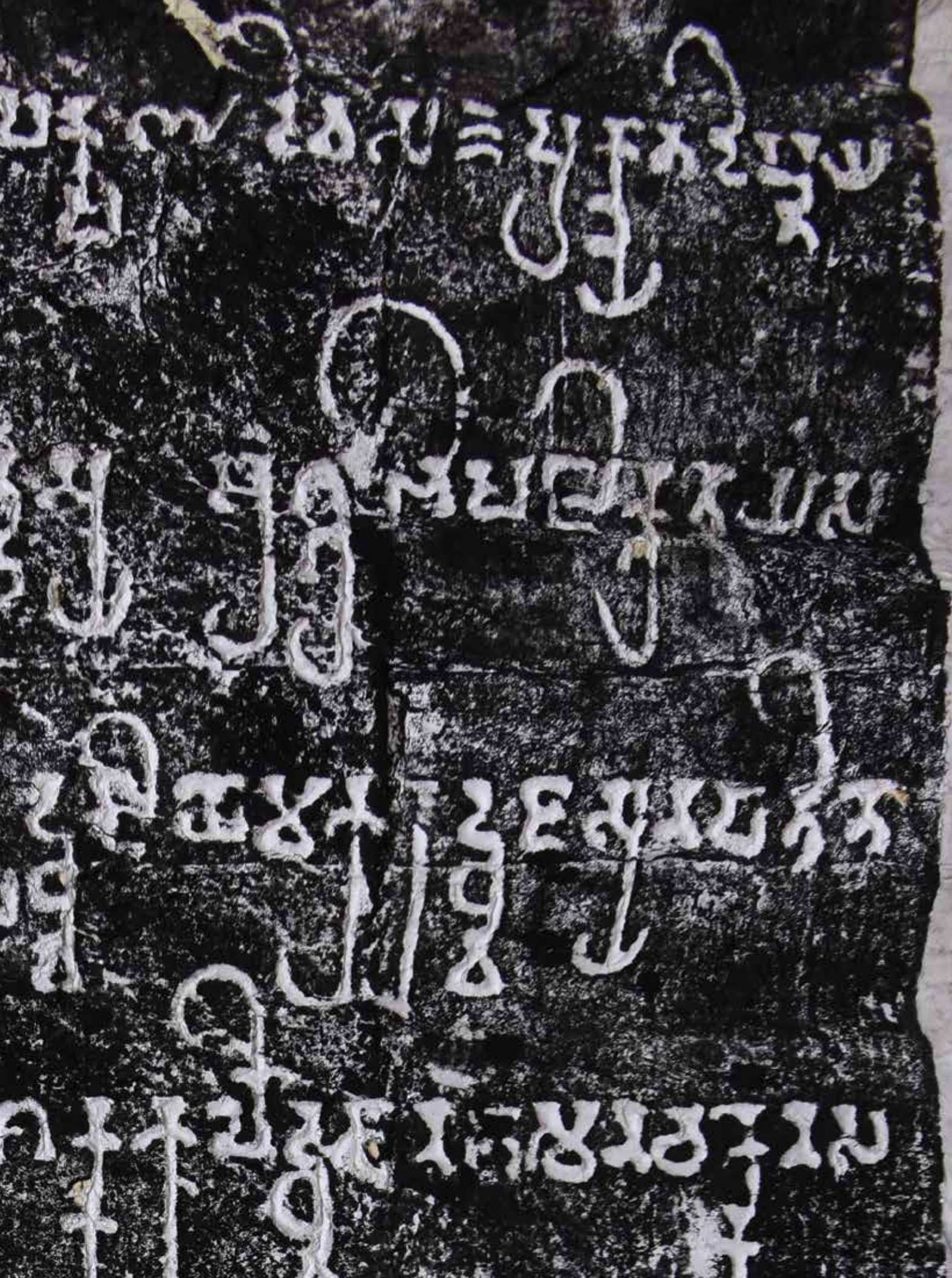
ENDNOTES

1 In a recent article, for instance, I have shown that there were different ways of representing Siddhartha and people brought all kinds of talismans and "superstitious" offerings to ancient Buddhist stupas. See Naman P. Ahuja, "A Buddhist Interpretation of Small Finds in the Early Historic Period", in *Inner and Central Asian Art and Archaeology II*, edited by Judith Lerner and Annette Juliano, Turnhout: Brepols, 2019, pp. 133–72. A.K. Coomaraswamy's study on yakshas informed us about how influential pre-existing deities were in shaping early Buddhist images. This has been extended by several scholars including Robert DeCaroli in his work *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Perhaps some of the most impressive and accessible studies on the changing nature of the Buddhist priesthood, laity and pilgrims have been provided by Gregory Schopen. Four volumes of his collected articles have been published by the University of Hawaii Press: *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks* (1997), *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters* (2004), *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India* (2005) and *Buddhist Nuns, Monks, and Other Worldly Matters* (2014).

2 K.M. Varma, *Amaravati and the Beginnings of Stucco Modelling in India,* Santiniketan: Proddu, 1985.

3 *Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: Essays in Early Indian Architecture*, edited by Michael W. Meister, New Delhi: Oxford University Press and IGNCA, 1991; Michael W. Meister, "Early Architecture and Its Transformations: New Evidence for Vernacular Origins of the Indian Temple", in *The Temple in South Asia: Volume 2 of the Proceedings of the 18th Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, London, 2005*, edited by Adam Hardy, London: The British Association for South Asian Studies, 2007, pp. 1–19.





INSCRIPTIONS AT PHANIGIRI

"Success! In the 18th year, in the 3rd fortnight of winter, on the 3rd day. 1. The chief physician of King Śrī-Rudrapuruṣadatta of well-known blazing fame carried out this erection of a Dharma wheel. 2. The banner of pride of the one with makara banner (= Kāma) that was not felled by the one with bull banner (= Śiva), that one has been felled by the descendant of the Śākya family by means of this wheel born from the excellent Dharma. 3. The demon of hatred that was not killed by the mighty killer of Kaṁsa (= Kṛṣṇa), killer of Madhu (= Viṣṇu), that one was killed by the killer of passion by means of this excellent wheel. 4. The great forests of defilements have been burned by him with the flame of knowledge that has the qualities of the highest dhyāna as fuel and its origin in the fire stick that is the body of Māyā, by means of this very wheel. May the world with gods, demons and men know…that this wheel endowed with such qualities is a donation by Nandiṇṇaka in the pleasure-grove of the Great General, erected for the sake of bringing about his own nirvāṇa, and effected by the Venerable Dhammasena!"

This is the rough translation of the most important inscription found in Phanigiri (figure 1.22). Inscribed on an octagonal pillar (figure 1.23), it records the donation of a dharmachakra by Nandinnaka, the aggrabhisaja (chief physician) of King Rudrapurushadutta. Previously it was believed that construction in Nagarjunakonda ended in the 11th regnal year of Rudrapurushadatta; but this inscription extends his reign by 7 years to his 18th regnal year. What prompted the chief physician to donate at Phanigiri? Was there a jvaralaya (health centre) like the one in Nagarjunakonda providing medical facility to the laity? The receiver in this donation is the venerable Dhammasena.

This name again figures in another inscription which states that Vinayadhara Dhammasena along with his relatives provided for repairs (probably to the vihara), preparation of the flower canopy for the annual Pavarana festival, oil to the lamps, cows and six karshapanas (gold coins). The inscription specifies the units of measurement for oil (sanikis) and the breed of cows donated (taridela). It also states that the donations have the approval of the mahanavakammika (chief supervisor of works) and are made to the Bhagavant's (Buddha's) own property (svakanibandha). Ownership in the name of the Buddha rather than the sangha shifts the legitimizing force away from the collective and gives a type of primacy to the Buddha not commonly associated with older Theravada. Does this specific attribution indicate the doctrinal orientation of the donors and the donees? In particular, the Bahusrutiya sect did not believe that the Buddha was part of the sangha. The possibility of their influence at the site cannot be disregarded as they were the second most popular sect in the Krishna valley after the Aparamahavinaseliyas. The attribution is also reflective of a shift in the nature of Buddhism itself.

A third inscription at Phanigiri mentions navakammika (supervisor) Budhisiri of Vardhamana. This may indicate the close connection of Phanigiri with the Buddhist kshetra of Vardhamanukota. We also come across two women donors, Kitanika and Budhannika: the latter's donation is inscribed on a fragment of an ayaka pillar found near the Phanigiri mahastupa (figure 1.21). These suggest the kind of the independence and decision-making powers women from royal families and the laity may have had in matters related to finance and property ownership. The reference to royal figures and court officials also brings focus on the close association between the ruling class and the Buddhist establishment in Phanigiri.

In the meritorious gifts of Kitanika and Dhammasena, we find the specific mention of the gifts being made to achieve nirvana for one's self. Several inscriptions at Nagarjunakonda mark a clear differentiation made between other merits which are expected for all kith and kin and that of nirvana expected for the self. Scholar Nalinaksha Dutt argues that this objectifying view on nirvana by Andhakas or the Saila schools is completely different from Theravadins for whom nibbana (nirvana) is something which is to be realized within one's self by the wise.

Text by N.R. Visalatchy with inputs from Naman P. Ahuja. The translation of the Rudrapurushadatta inscription is from the *Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa* (EIAD) 104. Henceforth in this book, the EIAD abbreviation will be used to refer to inscriptions from this compilation. For more about this compilation, see Endnote 1 on p. 61.

1.20

1.21

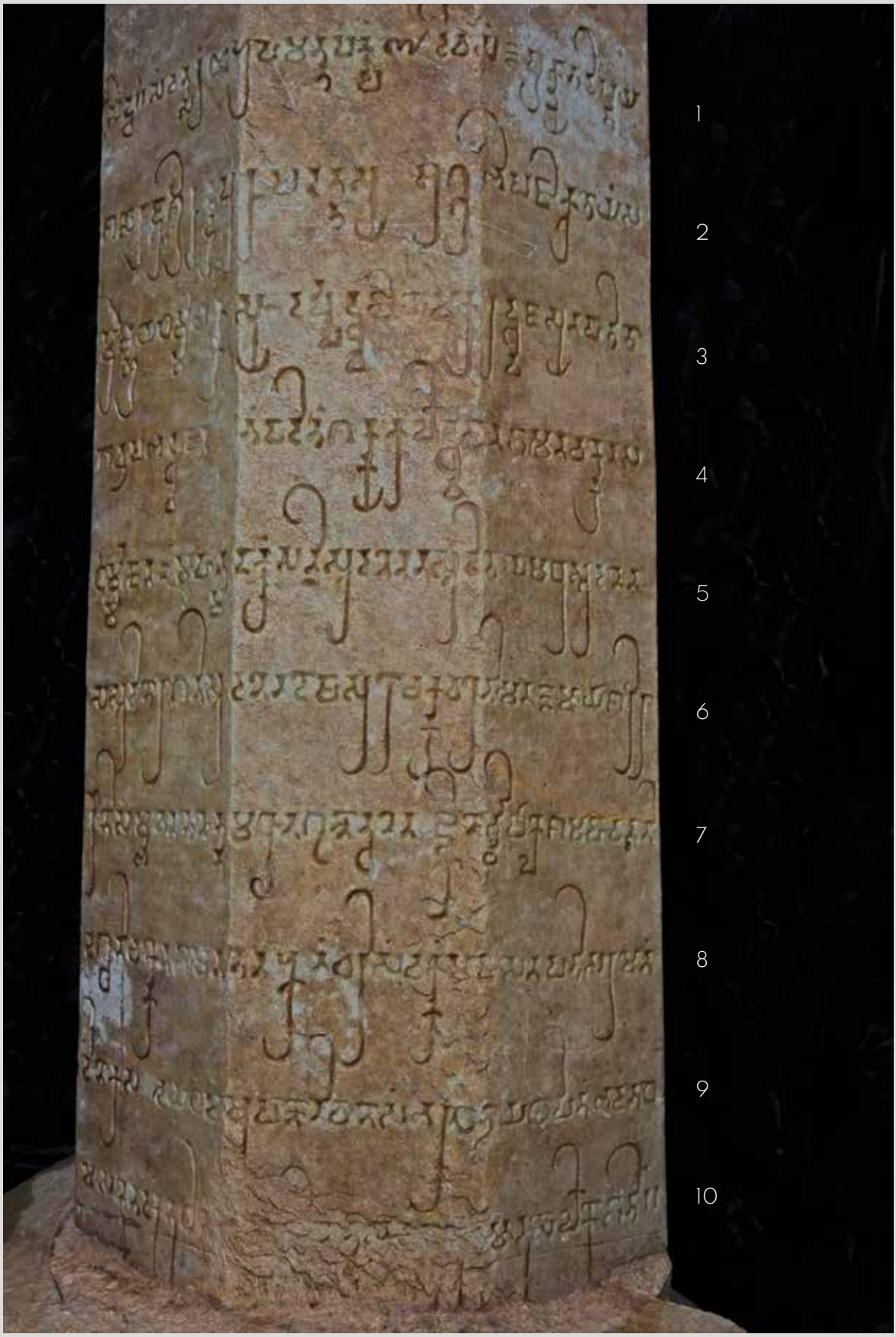
1.22

1.20 Fragments of inscriptions found at Phanigiri that are yet to be deciphered. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

1.21 An inscription on one of the ayaka pillar fragments near the Phanigiri mahastupa, marking the donation by Budhannika, the wife of gahapati Tummaka. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

1.22 Estampage of the Rudrapurushadutta inscription. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

1.23 The Rudrapurushadutta inscription on an octagonal pillar fragment found at Phanigiri, with the line numbers corresponding to the translated text provided in the first paragraph on p. 31. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.



1.23

CHAPTER 2

BUDDHISM AT PHANIGIRI

Peter Skilling
(Bhadra Rujirathat)

Pages 36–38
2.1 Detail from the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
This tableau depicts post-nirvana scenes with monks and nagas. The events do not match any of the known Buddhist texts and may be local or regional narratives of which no textual records survive. This scene shows two monks seated cross-legged in an open-air mountainous setting. Their robes cover the left shoulders, leaving the right shoulders bare. Below their raised seats are water pitchers, and in front of the monk on the viewer's right, a gazelle or antelope. This monk sits below a tree in which a peacock perches. Both the monks appear to be teaching the Dharma to male and female regally-attired figures who respectfully raise their clasped hands as they listen. The two males who sit next to the monk on the left and have haloes may be devas. In the background, two monks repel nagas, one of them five-headed, that approach through the air. The decision to feature these scenes on the torana shows that these narratives must have been important, even foundational, for the Phanigiri community. That today we cannot identify them shows how textual silence (the "Deccan gap") hampers our attempts to retrieve the particularities of the Buddhist landscape of Andhradesha.

Two thousand years ago a Buddhist complex was constructed on the flat top of the massive stone outcrop that is known today as Phanigiri. We do not know the site's ancient name, but in the archaeology of Buddhism this is the norm—the epigraphic record crumbled into fragments, and memories were erased by the passage of time, episodic vandalism and the evolution of new cultural landscapes. Even in the "changeless India" of the discredited colonial tropes, landscapes never stood still. A pillar fragment refers to a "great monastery" (mahavihara) that may have given its name, but the crucial words are broken off.[1] The complex grew and flourished to become a high-profile religious centre with a large brick stupa as its spiritual heart. The quality of the devotional and decorative art, which includes a majestic free-standing torana (cf. figures 6.8 and 6.9), bespeaks the site's regional importance.

For several centuries the hill would have echoed with the melodious sounds of Prakrit and Sanskrit liturgies. Festoons of fresh flowers would have adorned the shrines, plumes of fragrant incense would have wafted into the air, banners and pennants would have fluttered and the flames of offering lamps would have flickered in the breeze. Monks and nuns would have shuffled back and forth from their residences to the assembly halls, study and meditation centres, and ritual spaces. Lay devotees, male and female—some of them associated with the royal court—would have climbed the hill to make offerings, to participate in rituals and to seek knowledge and peace of mind.

MINDING THE DECCAN GAP

The recitations and rituals have long fallen silent and the pathways and courtyards have long ceased to bustle with activity. The local Buddhist communities dispersed or were absorbed as the demographic constitution of society changed, and for a millennium and a half the site has been deserted. In the absence of historical memory, how do we retrieve the meaning of a site like Phanigiri? Our quest for meaning is frustrated by the "Deccan gap", by which I mean a lack of literature or written records, a long lacuna in both time and space. In terms of time, the gap stretches across centuries; in terms of space it yawns from the Gangetic plains in the north to Sri Lanka in the south: a gaping black hole in a literary firmament that once resounded with Buddhist voices. The gap extends from the Western caves of the Konkan to Gujarat and Sindh, to the Vindhyas, Chhattisgarh, Vidarbha and Odisha, to Andhra and the Dravidian lands.[2]

Wherever Buddhism travelled, it brought its textual baggage along. This was at first an entirely oral process: Shakyamuni's teachings were not written down until the 1st century BC, about 400 years after his passing. Canonical texts must have been brought to Andhradesha orally by Dharma and Vinaya masters. Specialists trained in memorization and recitation preserved sections or portions of the teaching (dharmaskandha) in their memories and transmitted the Dharma through living example and instruction.

Centuries later the texts began to be written down and manuscripts circulated throughout the region. A large and well-supported monastic centre like Phanigiri must have had a library with manuscript holdings, but none of these survive. What have survived at Phanigiri and elsewhere are transmutations of texts from the spoken word into other media, for example the Buddha's life or past life stories carved in stone relief (figures 2.2–2.4).

In a word, the literary traditions of early Buddhism and Andhradesha were entirely lost and the Buddhist past slumbered in amnesia for more than a millennium. The

2.2 and 2.3 Details from the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
(**2.2**) Two merchants, Trapusha and Bhallika, present the Buddha with his first meal after his awakening. In similar scenes of the Buddha receiving alms from Sujata, or (in the Pala art of north India) from a monkey, the Buddha sits on a throne or support with his legs suspended.
(**2.3**) A group of ascetics pay reverence to Shakyamuni during his first sermon delivered at the deer park in Sarnath. For a full view of this scene, see figure 6.18 on p. 175.

2.4 Detail from the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
Siddhartha leads the pampered life of a prince and is married to a beautiful princess, attended by a throng of ladies in waiting. One night he wakes up in his seraglio: the charm has dissipated, the instruments have fallen silent, and the women snore as they sprawl clumsily. The prince realizes that his comfortable life is but an illusion and decides to leave the palace in quest of truth. This tableau depicts his existential crisis.

result is that we do not know what textual traditions inspired the region's rich figurative and devotional art. We are in the dark about the preferred canonical languages, although it is safe to assume that they were early Middle Indics. This hypothesis is supported in principle by stray and scattered finds of "stone sutras": the Prakrit sutras on Dependent Arising (*Pratityasamutpada*) from Devnimori in Gujarat and Ratnagiri in Odisha, a short canonical inscription on the four truths of the noble ones from the Bagh caves in Madhya Pradesh, and a verse on the four truths from Guntupalli in Andhra Pradesh.[3]

Prakrit was the lingua franca in the Buddhist inscriptions of the whole of India. These mostly record donations and sangha affairs, but the Prakrit label inscriptions or captions of Bharhut, Kanaganahalli and a few other sites are literary insofar as

they refer to texts, to canons oral or written. The Prakrit that modern scholars prefer to call Pali—the scriptural language of the Theravamsa, which in its own tradition is called Magadhi—seems to have had a limited presence in the south. There are no inscriptions, but literary references in the Pali commentaries of Sri Lanka suggest that Pali was an important part of the textual environment at Kanchipuram and elsewhere in the Tamil lands.

Liturgies and legendary memories—narratives of Shakyamuni, of his wanderings and the footprints and relics that he left behind, and those of past Buddhas, of future Buddhas like Maitreya, of bodhisatvas—created sacred landscapes. Xuanzang mentions Shakyamuni's visit to the south, the Kalachakra-tantra is connected with Dhanyakataka, and the great *Gandavyuha-sutra* of the *Buddhavatamsaka* collection

describes the good youth Sudhana's journey through southern India to meet and seek wisdom from teachers who will help him on his path to awakening. Many of the bodhisatvas lived in different places in the south, including the perennially popular Avalokiteshvara whom Sudhana visits on Mount Potalaka. But whatever relation it may or may not have had to the geography of the land, Sudhana's is a spiritual and literary journey, a pilgrim's progression in the cultivation of the bodhi mind. Sadly though, no practical "lonely planet" pilgrim guides survive from the ancient period to guide us through these landscapes of the south.

Buddhist communities made an industry of weaving stories about how the Buddha's visits sanctified and empowered their homelands. The Dharma's geographical progress is elaborated in accounts of Shakyamuni's travels to the northwest, to Kashmir and Gandhara, to Lanka and to Southeast Asia. Sacralization went on for four or five centuries, only to be followed by desecration and desertion.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCATION AND PLANNING

Phanigiri has a very special setting (cf. Map on pp. 12–13). Spread across the spacious hilltop, the palatial complex commands a panoramic view of the wide plains below with their backdrop of undulating mountains and hills, gazing down on sites like Vardhamanukota, Tirumalagiri and Gajulabanda, rich in antiquities and architectural remains. Amaravati, Guntupalli, Nagarjunakonda—famous stupa complexes discovered early in the 20th century—lie in the lower courses or deltas of the Deccan rivers. Unlike them, Phanigiri stands in the middle of the river system. To the west, the monastic landscape changes from structural stupa culture to rock-cut architectural culture at the headwaters of the rivers along the Western Ghats and in the coastal areas of Konkan. Routes lead from Phanigiri to urban Satavahana sites like Kondapur in Telangana and Paithan (ancient Pratishthana) in Maharashtra, or downstream to Dharanikota and Vijayapuri. In broader terms, Phanigiri belongs to a network of structural stupas that links the monasteries of the Deccan plateau to Gujarat, Sindh, Punjab, Haryana, Gandhara, Afghanistan, Bactria and Central Asia (cf. Map on p. 11). In a word, Phanigiri was connected.

This is an ancient landscape. It has been a centre of human activity from prehistoric and pre-Buddhist times to the present. Traders followed the river valleys, leaving traces in the shape of punch-marked coins, gold and silver Roman coins (cf. figure 4.23), or the issues of successive dynasties. Phanigiri was a node in the transregional and even the world economy.[4] It developed during India's Buddhist building boom, the heyday of middle-period architecture and engineering i.e. from the 1st–6th centuries AD, and it illustrates how conscientiously the designers and engineers planned the complex, integrating living quarters and devotional and ritual structures. They took advantage of the natural contours of the hilltop, linking built structures and dedicated spaces with staircases, platforms and pathways coated with lime plaster. Water supply was regulated and stored through the use of cisterns (cf. figure 4.30). Monastic "supervisors of works" (navakammika) must have played a role in the architecture and planning. At least two participated in separate deeds of merit on the hill; the same individuals might well have been active in the planning.[5]

PATRONAGE AND SUPPLY CHAIN

Phanigiri became a prominent Buddhist site in Telangana. It was a place to make offerings to the Three Precious Gems—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha—and to worship the Buddha's relics under the open sky. It was a refuge to refresh

and restore one's person and peace of mind. Like other stupa-vihara complexes, it would have been a centre of training and education for both monastics and lay followers. It attracted elite sponsors associated with the Ikshvaku court and it must have been a lively cultural centre. One of the donors was a royal physician. Like other monasteries at the time, was Phanigiri also a centre for medical knowledge? Were medicinal herbs cultivated in the area? This is a question that merits further investigation.

What were the hilltop monastery's supply lines? It is hard to imagine that the monastics descended the steep slopes to seek alms from the villages below. It is more likely that donors arranged for adjacent villages to support the monastic and stupa complexes with food and supplies that were brought up the hill to be prepared and served in kitchens and refectories (cf. figure 4.28).

Two prominent donors are known from inscriptions: King Rudrapurushadatta's "chief physician" (aggrabhisaja) and the monk Dhammasena. Among those who participated in the deeds of merit were a "great general" and a "great supervisor of works" (mahasenapati and mahanavakammika). Other names, including those of kings, are given in very fragmentary inscriptions that await analysis.

Dhammasena's group donated 150 cows. Otherwise, no grants of livestock or property have been recovered at Phanigiri to date. Land grants were usually recorded on copper plates. Whenever or wherever they or other metal objects have been discovered, the metal has usually been melted down and sold by weight to bring in immediate cash. Historians are lucky whenever copper plates or metal artefacts do survive and reach public knowledge.

What was the monastery's relation to the agricultural communities of the fertile river valleys? We lack the sort of social indicators that might clarify this question. Was the local society made up of merchants and freeholders, of farmers and serfs, or a mix of different social groups? By the time Phanigiri was conceived, many monastic establishments were maintained through produce and revenue channelled through land grants, a mechanism that began early in the Satavahana period. When donors built and donated a monastery, they did not just offer empty buildings and inactive agricultural land. If they did so, then how would the monastery function? Donors were expected, perhaps even socially obligated, to offer a whole support system with a panoply of material and human resources. In northeastern India, the large monastic complex of Nalanda "possessed 201 villages donated by several generations of rulers".[6] Were the village communities around Phanigiri endowments, along with their livestock, fields and orchards, for the maintenance of the Buddha, the stupa and the sangha?

Where did the monks and nuns come from? What was the social background of the recruits? Why did people ordain? There is little to no evidence for these. Motivation was no doubt complex and many-faceted, and people may have ordained to make merit, to study, to practise self-cultivation or to gain status and a livelihood.

Buddhist monastic centres transformed the countryside and, with it, rural society. There was increased consumption, the exploitation of local and regional construction materials and an influx of luxury products. The building projects required expertise, planning and technologies, including water control for agriculture and social use. Monastic centres developed a high-end material culture; they were, so to speak, urban enclaves in the countryside. They were nodes in networks of a diffused urbanization that flourished well beyond the capitals and cities, nodes in the circulation of goods, aesthetic ideas and ideals, currents of philosophy and metaphysics. As a cultural

process, urbanization is not limited to conurbations; it marks a lifestyle, a pattern of consumption and a way of thinking. Integral to mercantilism, it was carried by the habits and expectations of nobles and merchants—and, most probably, monastics—who had grown used to certain refined levels of culture, comfort and living. It was broadly in the same period as the dominion of the Ikshvakus in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE that these developments were denounced in Vaitulya/Mahayana sutras like *Questions of Raṣṭrapala* and satirized by later dramatists.[7]

Monastic settlements were complex social conglomerations. Textual references show that they accommodated diverse groups of resident specialists. In the Vaitulya/Mahayana literature, the *Questions of Ugra* paints a picture of the heterogeneity of the sangha. It recommends that a layperson who visits a monastery should reflect on the various activities of the community of monks as follows: "Which monk is a learned one? Which monk is a Dharma-preacher? Which monk is a Vinaya-holder? Which monk is a Mātṛkā-holder? Which monk is a Bodhisattva-piṭaka holder? Which monk is a wilderness-dweller? Which monk lives on alms-food? Which monk dresses in rags from the dust heap, has few desires, is satisfied [with what he has], and lives in seclusion? Which monk does yoga-practice? Which monk practises meditation? Which monk belongs to the Bodhisattva-Vehicle? Which monk is in charge of repairs? Which monk is the administrator? Which monk is the overseer?"[8]

Monastic complexes were urban communities, planned residential zones which controlled and manipulated the surrounding environment through the construction of dams, dykes and wells, offering drinking water, light and access to habitation (rock shelters, caves, structural residences) and education. That they controlled the ritual year is seen through the epigraphic mentions of the Pavarana festival (see below).[9]

As a whole, a Buddhist complex is landscaped to exploit natural features, but at the same time it is layered by centuries of development. The result is that the original conception undergoes a succession of alterations and transformations, as is only natural in the lives of structures and sites. Early sites were often built in relation to rock shelters, rock paintings and older burial sites; the nature of these relationships remains to be understood, but this is the ecology in which early Buddhist interventions emerged.

BUDDHIST PRACTICE AT PHANIGIRI

What kind of Buddhism was practised at Phanigiri? What is the site's religious background, its religious history? Different sites and regions would have had "unique sets of texts, images, and rituals"[10] and would have evolved continually. During this period "unchanging India" was anything but stagnant.

To attempt to answer these questions, we need to take recourse to the material remains. What can they teach us? At Phanigiri there is a large stupa or chaitya with gateways and a circumambulatory path, alongside subsidiary or satellite stupas.[11] In the neighbouring zone, there are two apsidal halls, both enshrining small stupas, and a stone-pillared assembly hall (cf. figure 4.9). At another end of the site, there are two other apsidal shrines. There are several large footprints of the Buddha (Buddhapadas) (figures 2.5–2.9) and at least six viharas. These are all basic components of a Buddhist complex, mainstream elements *shared* by the various Buddhist orders, schools and communities (whatever one may wish to call them). The bare materiality does not help to distinguish one Buddhist school from another; choices of style and iconography, of narrative and devotional themes and attendant rituals did not follow fixed blueprints. They would be influenced by

2.5 A pair of Buddhapadas found near the cells on the left side of the Phanigiri mahastupa and currently in the Centenary Heritage Museum, Hyderabad. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

2.6–2.9 Four Buddhapada slabs discovered in the area close to the Phanigiri mahastupa. Figures 2.6 and 2.7: Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Figures 2.8 and 2.9: Courtesy Peter Skilling.

2.6

2.7

2.8

2.9

The pairs of Buddhapadas in figures 2.7 and 2.9 were found in front of the apsidal chaityagrihas in Zone 3. While the former has been left in situ, the latter is currently in the Phanigiri sculpture shed along with the Buddhapadas in figures 2.6 and 2.8.

These footprints are marked with signs of good fortune and power. They typically have at their centres a thousand-spoked wheel, emblem of the universal emperor or chakravartin and the universal teacher, the Buddha. Surrounding the wheels and on the toes are a range of other auspicious symbols which include nandyavartas (complex trifoliate vegetal motifs), svastikas (circlets of blessings), ankushas (elephant goads of prowess), purnakumbhas (pots of plenty), matsyayugalas (paired fishes of fertility), bhadrapitthas (thrones symbolic of royalty and authority) and shrivatsas (emblems of prosperity and glory).

These footprints with symbols represent the establishment of Buddhism in an area and the blessings that the Buddha and his teachings bring. The toes usually face the viewer as when he or she bows his or her head at the master's feet.

prevailing fashions of the sangha or preferences of the court or patrons. Dreams, predictions and legends also played a role in the evolution of landscapes.

In the absence of epigraphic evidence, the material records alone, the architecture and the design or layout of sites, cannot tell us much about the specific affiliation of a school at a site—which Vinaya school (nikaya) represented the sangha. From the late 19th century till today, to classify sites as "Hinayana" or "Mahayana" (and eventually as "Vajrayana") without any local or epigraphic evidence has been a popular sport among scholars. None of the "yana" terms are suitable for historical research. They belong to the history of ideas and practices; the yanas were not discrete historical or social groups, much less "churches" or "faiths" or bodies of "believers".[12] The broad and interwoven streams of practice and thought known as Shravakayana and Mahayana do not really enter into the question. The paths of the shravaka who follows the early teachings collected by the "auditors" and those of the bodhisatva, who aspires to become a Buddha, are not separated by physical spaces but by *choice*, by metaphysical distinctions. They are not physically separate "churches" that do not communicate with each other. Shravakayana and Mahayana practice can exist together in one and the same individual according to his or her vows and aims. Individuals who follow either path can live and practise in the same monastery. This is seen in epigraphic sources and from ample literary evidence such as the passage from *Questions of Ugra* cited above.

The majority of Indian Buddhist sites offer little, if any, local information about the geographic evolution of monastic schools; whatever records there may once have been have not survived. By way of contrast, Sri Lanka has its epic mythography, the *Great Chronicle* (*Mahavamsa*), which records over 2,000 years of the history of the Dharma on the island from the standpoint of a single monastery, the Mahavihara or "great monastery" which championed a single monastic order, the Theravamsa. Unfortunately, there are no comparable written overviews or contemporaneous chronicles of the evolution of Buddhism and the Buddhist sites of India. Evidence of Indian records that are otherwise lost is seen in the chapter entitled "Account of the Introduction of the Buddha's Teachings into the Smaller Islands and of its Revival in the South" in the *History of the Dharma* written by the Tibetan polymath Taranatha (1575–1634). Taranatha opens the following chapter, "Account of the Spread of the Dharma in the South as Related in the *Garland of Flowers*" by stating that he has "not seen any separate written work on the royal chronology of south India and of the Koki countries".[13] He goes on to cite or paraphrase "the work called the *Garland of Flowers* composed by the brāhmaṇa Manomati, which contains a brief account of those kings that helped the spread of the Buddha's teachings in the south and excellently worked there for the welfare of living beings".[14] At the conclusion of his *History*, Taranatha names his sources in general and refers again to the *Garland of Flowers*.[15] This and other literary accounts (for example, Kalhana's 11th-century *Rajatarangiṇi*) show how Buddhist historiography did exist, but, alas, today all of these works are lost.

In Gandhara, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda there are a number of dedication inscriptions that name the Buddhist schools or nikayas to which a donation or endowment is made. The mention of nikaya was a legal nicety for the donor and the sangha at the time of the dedication; it did not legally involve or concern ordinary devotees or even the visiting members of the Buddhist sanghas (agantuka). Further, at Phanigiri there are no inscriptions of scriptures, of texts that might provide clues to the scriptural and liturgical language(s) used by the resident sanghas.

Does "school affiliation" matter that much?[16] Or has modern scholarship—from the late 19th century onwards—exaggerated its importance? Buddhists did not label their centres (or their scriptural collections) and declare them as belonging to this or that Vinaya school. Many monasteries appear to have welcomed members of the "sangha of the four directions" (chaturdisha sangha, often translated as "universal sangha") or members of the "18 nikayas", a figure that represents the conglomeration of Buddhist schools. We do not have any master register of monasteries and nunneries for any area or region, let alone for South Asia as a whole. The information about "school" or "sectarian" affiliation comes to us indirectly. One source is the reports of Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing. Usually their statements cannot be corroborated, but at times viharas are identified by clay monastic sealings issued in the names of the monasteries themselves, or by land grants that refer to specific nikayas. Often, but by no means always, donors specify the recipient, the corporate body to whom they are making a donation. These are charters and legal documents and the information for the original donation would have to be accurate; but sometimes documents were altered or forged and attest to layered histories.

Yijing wrote that "In the south all monks follow the Sthavira-nikāya, while the other nikāyas have few followers."[17] This goes against the general testimony of the inscriptions and the material evidence. Only two inscriptions attest to a Sthavira presence, while all other donative inscriptions that mention monastic orders refer to other schools.[18] Could Yijing be mistaken about the Sthaviras? Was his knowledge limited to the coastal areas, to the urban centres at Kanchipuram, Nagapattinam and other coastal locations? The rich—but by no means complete—epigraphic records, the donative inscriptions from the deltaic sites like Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, show that Theravada was present as one school among equals, side by side with Mahasanghika and other lineages. Yijing's accounts are relatively trustworthy; but in cases where he did not visit a place in person, he based his reports on what he heard from others.

A recurrent problem in Buddhist studies is the conflation of "Theravada" with notions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy and with an idealized "early Buddhism". It has become the default nikaya that is called up even when there is no epigraphic or other evidence for its presence. The reality is that we do not know which of the early Buddhist schools (traditionally enumerated as 18) were active at the site. A strand of modern scholarship (dating to the 19th century) gives "Theravada" sole charge of the period when no Buddha images were produced and puts "Mahayana" in charge of the period when images began to proliferate. This thoroughly ahistorical history misrepresents the question of images entirely. Monks and nuns of the 18 nikayas sponsored images for merit, benefit and inspiration, regardless of whether or not they followed Vaitulya/Mahayana practices. The production of images was a *shared* practice that had no intrinsic connection with Mahayana thought and practice.

What can we learn from Phanigiri's material remains? The large stupa shows the importance of the cult of relics, making the monastery both a site for and a memorial to the living Buddha. As at other stupa sites in Andhradesha, relic caskets with their contents have been recovered at Phanigiri (cf. figure 1.6).[19] The surrounding passageways attest that one of the main rituals at Phanigiri would have been circumambulation. Liturgies that have survived in Sanskrit or in translation show how walking around a chaitya helps the devotee pay homage to the Buddha and earn spiritual merit. This would be reinforced by offerings (dana) to the Buddha and the sangha.

2.10–2.14 Details from the abacus of the broken yashti which once decorated the top of the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
The auspicious symbols include a lotus medallion, a dharmachakra stambha, the bodhi tree, nagas and (unusually) an owl.

Verses on the circumambulation of chaityas are embedded in a cognate group of texts that had a wide geographical diffusion: in Sanskrit manuscripts from Gilgit in Kashmir, from Nepal, from the Potala collection in Lhasa, and from texts translated into Chinese, Tibetan and Khotanese.[20] The source materials belong to the Mahasanghika-Lokottaravadin (*Mahavastu*), Mulasarvastivadin (several sections of the *Vinayavastu*), and doubtless other Vinaya lineages. Similar verses may have been known in Andhradesha and at Phanigiri; but given the "Deccan gap", this remains an assumption.

The verses laud the benefits of circumambulating stupas: the devotee gains protection, security and respect; good looks, health, wealth, happiness and longevity; good rebirths including as a wheel-turning emperor or as a king of the whole register of gods, from Shakra up to Brahma. Merit gained from making offerings to the Buddha through his stupas does not have any use-by or expiry date.

There is no difference between the merit of those
Who make offerings while I am here, and those
Who make offerings after my nirvāṇa,
If their virtuous intentions are the same.[21]

EPIGRAPHY: RECORDS WRITTEN IN STONE[22]

The inscriptions of Phanigiri have not yet been fully catalogued and published. This is an urgent task, because a full account of the epigraphic record will enable us to

understand the site much better.[23] Epigraphy gives information on language use, script use, patronage and the specifics of a site's evolution. Fortunately for our purposes, two long inscriptions from Phanigiri yield considerable information: one records the donation of a dharma-wheel by a royal physician (EIAD 104) and another records the donation of a monk named Dhammasena (EIAD 105). Both are elegantly calligraphed in the contemporary southern Brahmi script; both record cooperative or collective donations involving family and court figures. This fits in well with what we know from contemporaneous inscriptions across India and beyond. Making merit was a family, group and social enterprise. By definition, merit is to be shared, and this sharing multiplies the merit of those who initiated the donation and all others involved.

The Chief Physician's Dharma-Wheel:[24] An octagonal pillar bears an inscription with three Sanskrit verses framed by a brief introduction and conclusion in Prakrit prose (cf. figures 1.22 and 1.23). It commemorates the setting up of a dharma-wheel (dharmachakra) by the "chief physician of glorious king Rudrapurushadatta". The poem is an example of Buddhist ideological triumphalism that celebrates the moral superiority of the Buddha over Hindu deities. In tenor the verses belong to a genre of "Buddhist apologetic hymns". The authors' dates are not known but they may belong to the early Christian Era, in which case the composition could be roughly contemporary with the inscription of the Phanigiri poem, the source and date of which is also unknown.[25] An example is Udbhattasiddhasvamin's *Viśeṣastava*, Verse 8 of which reads:

The bearers of the discus and the spear [Viṣṇu and Mahādeva (Śiva)]
Were unable to overcome the forces of Māra;
Yet you, [the Buddha], without discus or spear,
Vanquished them with the sole weapon of loving kindness.[26]

The three verses exalt the Buddha's victory over desire, hatred and defilements (klesha).

The Inscription of Dhammasena: Dhammasena's inscription is engraved on a rectangular pillar or doorjamb (the exact nature of the object is not clear). At least the first and the last lines are lost, but otherwise the epigraph is complete. It records a donation—of exactly what is not clear because the words are missing.[27] The monk Dhammasena heads a group enterprise that brings together six of his relations, whose names are given in lines 3 to 7, along with "all blood relations, friends, and relatives", one of them a female ascetic (pavajitika). Dhammasena is a Vinaya master (Vinayadhara), an expert in the legal lore of his lineage, which regulates the monastic life of resident and visiting members of the sangha.[28]

At Nandalur in Andhra Pradesh, a 2nd-century Vinaya master named Budhi donated a footprint slab elegantly carved with signs of good fortune (mangala).[29] The inscriptions of Mathura and Amaravati record the names of Vinaya masters who donated Buddha images. Vinaya masters were powerful figures whose contributions to the life of the monasteries went beyond the rules and regulations to the production of art and literature. They were key figures in the transmission of Buddhist knowledge and ceremony, and Dhammasena was probably just such a figure. His donation dedicates funds for the repair and maintenance of monastic structures and for the annual offering of flower canopies on the occasion of the Pavarana festival.

Beyond this, a broken slab inscription from Phanigiri appears to refer in similar terms to an annual donation for the Pavarana festival.[30] Pavarana (Pravarana in Sanskrit), which takes place at the end of the three-month rainy season retreat, is an important event in the annual cycle of monastic rites.[31] The monks who had spent the rainy season within a shared boundary assemble and each monk invites his fellows to point out any infringements or wrongs they may have "seen, heard or suspected". The purpose of the rite is to promote mutual understanding, forgiveness and harmonious relations. Dated to about 300 AD, the Phanigiri records are the oldest epigraphic references to this festival recovered in India so far (there is another early inscription from Sri Lanka).

ART AND EMBELLISHMENT

The glory of Phanigiri art lies in its stone and stucco sculpture, its carved pillars and friezes, and its architecture—and the grand and organic conception of the site. There are several large images in the round of the standing Buddha in the style of the times (cf. figures 1.13–1.16). The art of Phanigiri attests to a distinctive, vigorous idiom within the Andhra style, closely related to that of Nagarjunakonda. A number of decorative pieces are distinctive in style and conception. The abacus of the broken yashti and a circular cushion-shaped capital depict some of the auspicious symbols that were popular in early Indian art (figures 2.10–2.21). The Buddhapadas are also marked by lucky signs, following a long-standing tradition that a Buddha was a paragon of good fortune (see figures 2.5–2.9).

There is no evidence of painting. But how much painting from India's early period survives anywhere? The rich heritage of rock-shelter painting may represent the interface of pre-Buddhist and Buddhist practices. Very little Buddhist painting,

devotional or narrative, survives throughout the region beyond the celebrated masterpieces of Ajanta and Bagh in Maharashtra and the meagre fragments found at Kanheri and elsewhere. In the Deccan, in the Andhra lands, there is nothing. This absence of paintings is a warning that we need to be cautious when we assess the material record: this record is fragmentary and we have to mind the gaps. Whole swathes are lost: tools, textiles, painted and written documents.

THE PHANIGIRI TORANA: A MASTERPIECE IN STONE

A wealth of masterful stone carvings has been recovered at Phanigiri, most of them broken by deliberate vandalism. These include three broken architraves of a splendid torana: free-standing toranas are rare in the south, and the Phanigiri torana is unmatched in the Buddhist sculpture of the Deccan.[32] The crossbars bear narratives of the life of the Buddha (see figures 2.2–2.4).[33] Identifiable scenes include the birth of the Buddha, the three sights that led to his realization of the suffering of existence, his last night in the palace, the great departure, events at the bodhi tree, and the first sermon in the deer park.[34] A medallion depicts the ascension of the turban relic. Some of the reliefs depict *Jatakas*. One of the birth stories that was widely popular in Andhra culture was that of King Mandhatar, which is depicted in over 60 reliefs.[35] At Phanigiri, he is depicted with the seven precious treasures and the "lotus" and "conch shell" (cf. figures 3.6, 3.7 and 7.25).

These may all be shared Andhra art themes, but one of the torana crossbars depicts what appear to be local histories—post-nirvana events involving the sangha, relic processions and nagas (see figures 2.1 and 2.22). The representation of relics is not incidental. Relics are the heart of Buddhist veneration.[36] They overspill the standard categories of contemporary art discourse—they are material, they are opulently housed and displayed, and at the same time they are alive with spiritual energies. They are at the core of ritual, art and liturgy. Nor are the depictions of nagas accidental: the propitiation of nagas for rain and fertility was a vital function of Buddhist agricultural and state ritual, and the iconographic and literary participation of nagas in the Buddhism of the south (and by no means only the south) is evident in the art of the region.

THE REGAL FIGURE: KING, BODHISATVA OR YAKSHA?

One of the impressive sculptures recovered at Phanigiri is a massive standing male figure depicted in the round (cf. figure 3.18). He is elegantly dressed, but to our great misfortune he has been mutilated and lacks head and arms. At first glance, the Phanigiri figure seems to be unique, but in fact several similar figures are known.[37] Three are displayed in the Kalachakra Museum, Amaravati. Two of these come from Tirumalagiri on the plain below Phanigiri, and one is from Etravaripalem in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh (cf. figures 3.21, 3.22 and 5.24).[38] They share similar features: their torsos are bare; they are clad in diaphanous dhotis held up by a belt, from which a piece of cloth falls to mid-thigh, forming a U at the front (an enduring fashion in male couture widely found in relief sculpture of the age). Like the Phanigiri figure, the other statues are mutilated. The Phanigiri figure rests his right hand, adorned with bracelets, on his hip, while the better-preserved torso from Tirumalagiri rests his left hand on his hip (the other two statues are damaged).[39] The Phanigiri figure sports necklaces, while the other three are unadorned. In all cases, the figure wears earrings; but alas, the head is missing. These four figures, all carved in the round, may perhaps be compared with a figure depicted on a slab,

2.15–2.21 A circular cushion-shaped capital from Phanigiri with auspicious symbols carved into its floral decorations. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

2.22 Detail from the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
Two monks appear to debate as they rise into the air from a body of water indicated by aquatic creatures. Below them, a male and female figure clasp their hands in salutation—perhaps a naga king and his queen. A group of monks look on. The scene is unique in Buddhist art and it cannot be explained by any of the known texts. It may be a local or regional event or legend that has not been preserved in written form.

from Kotta Nandayapalem in Guntur district (cf. figure 3.23).[40] The figure is complete. His torso is bare, and he wears a dhoti tied in a similar fashion. His left hand, with bracelets, rests on his hip. He wears armlets, a pair of earrings, a necklace and a headdress in the fashion of the times. He stands frontally and formally; in his right arm he holds a full-blown lotus flower. Four dwarves surround him in the lower register, two on each side.

There are at least two other cognate figures in the round in Phanigiri. One is a broken figure in a less formal posture;[41] another figure is headless but the right hand, raised and holding up a lotus, is preserved.[42] These have been described as Bodhisatva Padmapani.

What are we to make of these figures? Do they represent the same individual—and if so, who is he? In modern publications, he has been identified as a "royal figure" or, better, "regal figure",[43] as Siddhartha, a bodhisatva, or Padmapani.[44] What is the function of these large statues carved in the round?[45] I am at a loss to answer. It seems to me there is no way to identify the figure with any certainty, and since bodhisatvas are frequently depicted in royal attire, "regal figure" does not preclude that he is a bodhisatva. Akira Shimada, however, presents convincing comparative evidence that they are yakshas who stood guard at the gates of stupas.[46] John Guy too has discussed this at further length in his chapter in this book. So, this seems to be the most plausible suggestion so far.

THE DONATION OF VIHARAS

In the Pali *Vinaya*, the Buddha praises the gift of residences for the sangha as the supreme gift for the sangha, and advises that an intelligent person, for his own good, should have pleasant residences built and he should settle the well-versed in them—an early recognition of the value of education and the need to nurture potential educators. In the *Questions of King Milinda*, the sage monk Nagasena tells the king that the donation of viharas is praised by all Buddhas ("vihāradānaṃ nāma sabbabuddhehi vaṇṇitaṃ"), and that those who donate them will be freed from birth, ageing and death.[47] The repair and maintenance of viharas also brought merit; this is praised in Pali texts on benefits and blessings (anisamsa); for example, a Thai text called the *Praises of the Repair of Vihāras for Ajātasattu*.[48] In his *Precious Garland* (*Ratnavali*, Verse 231), Nagarjuna advises the king to make Buddha images, chaityas and viharas, and to build spacious and sumptuous residences or compounds. A variety of texts, including an inscription from Swat and one from Andhra, specify and praise the meritorious activity of erecting a stupa or viharas where there were none. These bring sublime or Brahmic merit (brahmapunya) which will lead to a long and blissful sojourn as a Brahma deity.[49]

In Andhradesha we see remains of viharas built during the early centuries of the Christian Era. This growth was interrupted and the viharas were abandoned, but the age of vihara building continued with increased vigour in north India, culminating in the great viharas erected during the Pala-Sena period.

TRANSITION

Phanigiri represents a magnificent moment in the history of Andhradesha, of Indian Buddhism, and of world cultural history. What happened to it? What was Phanigiri's fate? All things are momentary: impermanence prevailed and Phanigiri's moment passed. When even the highest reaches of the heavens are impermanent, how can a mere monastery last forever? Today we clutch at the straws of the past to

reconstruct a heritage that can invest our own present with meaning and, we hope, guide our future. As with all Buddhist sites, and most sites of antiquity, Phanigiri's fate is shrouded by the mists of time. It seems to have been abandoned by the close of the 4th century AD, not much after the later phases of construction. A hilltop luxury complex was not easy to maintain; like many other Buddhist sites, Phanigiri lacked a broad or enduring support base—it was too top-heavy to be sustainable.[50] Did it fall victim to changes in the patterns of trade and settlement, to the shifting fortunes of trade and power and the reconfiguration of the maps of commercial exchange? Did societal disruptions or changes in the patterns of patronage and religious allegiance lead to loss of support and interest from the court? Did the turmoil of religious, social or dynastic change lead to concerted assaults on the Buddhist culture of Andhradesha? Large images in the round of the standing Buddha in the style of the times are broken, as if they were deliberately smashed (cf. figures 1.13–1.16). Why are so many images and artefacts broken, as if in violent attack? There is no historical record, but history leaves many things unrecorded. History is the record of the winners. How and why the Buddhists lost out is one of many questions that remain to be answered.

"Serpent's hood hill" has existed since the beginning of time, and human activity began there long before history began to be written down. Phanigiri is a special space in the river valley plains. By the beginning of the Christian Era, if not earlier, it saw a settlement by the sangha and went on to become a prominent Buddhist site. By the 4th to 5th centuries, whether it suffered violent attacks or not, it was abandoned. We do not know whether the departure of the community was abrupt or gradual. In any case the communities who supported it dissolved or perhaps regrouped elsewhere, and the memory and meaning of Buddhist Phanigiri faded away.

Despite years of neglect and ruin, Phanigiri remains an exceptional site of the Buddhist heritage of Telangana, of the Deccan, and of South Asia as a whole. There is still much to learn about and from it. The art, architecture, ritual and monasticism of Phanigiri cannot be ignored in the study of the history of Buddhism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to all those who have offered advice and shared materials in the course of my research. I especially thank the Khyentse Foundation, Akira Shimada, Shrikant Bahulkar, Shrikant Ganvir, Vincent Tournier and Jens-Uwe Hartmann.

ENDNOTES

1 *Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa* (EIAD) 117. This online corpus, mainly compiled and edited by Stefan Baums, Arlo Griffiths, Ingo Strauch and Vincent Tournier, is a publication of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (Paris, France), realized in collaboration with the HiSoMA Research Centre (Lyon, France) and hosted by TGIR Huma-Num (France), http://hisoma.huma-num.fr/exist/apps/EIAD/index2.html.

2 Only a few Buddhist texts—famously the *Manimekhalai*—survive in Tamil.

3 Peter Skilling, "A Buddhist Verse Inscription from Andhra Pradesh", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 34 (1991), pp. 239–46 with reference to earlier publications.

4 For Phanigiri's location, see Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Ancient Routes of the Deccan and the Southern Peninsula*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2010, pp. 145–46.

5 A mahanavakammika in Dhammasena's inscription and a navakammika in inscription 9, a broken slab.

6 Tansen Sen, "Yijing and the Buddhist Cosmopolis of the Seventh Century", in *Texts and Transformations: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Victor H. Mair*, edited by Haun Saussy, Amherst: Cambria Press, 2018, p. 357. The land grants that maintained the Christian monasteries of Europe, including centres of education like Oxford and Cambridge, are examples of a similar mechanism.

7 For Vaitulya, see Peter Skilling, "Vaidalya, Mahāyāna, and Bodhisatva in India: An Essay Towards Historical Understanding", in *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of the Mahāyāna*, edited by Bhikkhu Nyanatusita, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2013, pp. 69–162.

8 *Ugra-paripṛcchā*, translation by Jan Nattier in *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to The Inquiry of Ugra*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003, pp. 273–74. For some of the administrative roles, see Jonathan A. Silk, *Managing Monks: Administrators and Administrative Roles in Indian Buddhist Monasticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

9 Sen, "Yijing and the Buddhist Cosmopolis", p. 353.

10 Ibid., pp. 358–59.

11 The latter are often called "votive stupas", a term which has little if any justification. A standard definition of "votive" is "offered or consecrated in fulfilment of a vow". Only a fraction of the stupas throughout the subcontinent have any inscriptions at all: it is impossible to say what sort of vows might have led to their construction. The few that do have inscriptions are produced as part of the fabric of merit-making. That certain stupas might have been erected "in fulfilment of a vow" is entirely possible; but in known cases the vows usually channel the merit towards participant groups in the present and the future. Many are likely to have contained relics of the elite or the monastic dead. For the latter, see Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Archaeology of Buddhism in South Asia*, London and New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 66–67, with references to earlier research.

12 The polemical "Hinayana" is best left aside and replaced by "Shravakayana" or some other term. See Skilling, "Vaidalya, Mahāyāna, and Bodhisatva in India".

13 "Koki countries" refers to mainland and island Southeast Asia.

14 *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India* (edited by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya), translated from the Tibetan by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Company, [1970] 1980, pp. 332–38, with some small adjustments.

15 *Garland of Flowers* (Tib. *Me tog 'phreng ba*) might stand for Pushpamala or Kusumamala. It is a matter of regret that the work was not translated into Tibetan and that the Sanskrit manuscripts of this and other historical materials consulted by Taranatha are not known to survive in either Tibet or India.

16 I wonder whether "school affiliation" is a natural English word or whether it is a back-translation for the melodious German compound, Schulzugehörigkeit.

17 Translation by Li Rongxi, cited in Sen, "Yijing and the Buddhist Cosmopolis", p. 359.

18 Note on terminology: "Sthavira" refers to the Sthavira nikaya, Sthavariyas or Theravamsa and Theravada.

19 The website of the Department of Heritage Telangana ("Recent findings from Buddhist Mahastupa, Phanigiri Village", heritage.telangana.gov.in, accessed October 14, 2019) reports that "During the scientific clearance works on January 6, 2015 a valuable

dull red ware earthen pot with silver container consisting of 11 miniature beads, three silver and three thin gold flower petals were discovered at the north eastern corner of Mahastupa, at the base of drum portion." This is a reliquary, but further inspection of the contents is required. The idea that the contents are the "personal belongings of Buddhist monks" and that "this Mahastupa may be considered as Paribhogika stupa" is far-fetched. Silver and gold flower petals and "miniature beasts" (although in the absence of photographs the nature and identity of these beasts is not clear to me) are frequently deposited in relic caskets together with physical relics believed to be those of Shakyamuni Buddha.

20 See Warner A. Belanger III, *Caityapradakṣiṇā Gāthā: A Critical Edition of the Tibetan Text based on Six Editions of the Kanjur*, thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, May 5, 2000.

21 *The Stupa: Sacred Symbol of Enlightenment*, Crystal Mirror Series, Vol. 12, edited by Tarthang Tulku, Berkeley: Dharma Press, 1977, p. 231.

22 References are to the EIAD by number or in other cases to B. Subrahmanyam, J. Vijaya Kumar, G.V. Ramakrishna Rao and K.S.B. Kesava, *Phanigiri: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh, An Interim Report, 2001–07*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2008, pp. 32–38. EIAD Nos. 103–23 are from Phanigiri.

23 *Interim Report*, pp. 32–38 counts 42 Satavahana and Ikshvaku inscriptions and publishes 13 examples. These preliminary readings and interpretations need revision.

24 Peter Skilling and Oskar von Hinüber, "An Epigraphical Buddhist Poem from Phanigiri (Andhrapradesh) from the Time of Rudrapuruṣadatta", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2010*, Vol. XIV (2011), pp. 7–12 and pls. 3–6; S. Baums, A. Griffiths, I. Strauch and V. Tournier, "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa: Results of Fieldwork in January and February 2016", *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. 102 (2016), pp. 369–77.

25 For the genre and a discussion of the dating, see Johannes Schneider, "Three Ancient Buddhist Apologetic Hymns", in *Glimpses of the Sanskrit Buddhist Literature*, Vol. I, edited by Kameshwar Nath Mishra, Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1997, pp. 47–56.

26 My translation. See also Leonard Zwilling, "The Viśeṣastava of Udbhaṭṭasiddhasvāmin", in *Studies in Pali and Buddhism: A Memorial Volume in Honor of Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap*, edited by A.K. Narain and L. Zwilling, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1979, pp. 407–14; Sangye T. Naga, "A Note on the Viśeṣastava (Khyad par 'phags bstod): 'Superior Verses in Praise [of Buddha Śākyamuni]'", *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1998), pp. 49–83. Studies and translations so far have been based on the Tibetan translation; a Sanskrit manuscript is now available and is being prepared for publication by Johannes Schneider. Related is Johannes Schneider, *Ein buddhistische Kritik der indischen Götter. Śaṃkarasvāmins Devātiśayastotra mit Prajñāvarmans Kommentar. Nach dem tibetischen Tanjur herausgegeben und übersetzt.*, Wiener Studien zur Tibetolotie und Buddhismuskunde, Vol. 81, Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2014.

27 Oskar von Hinüber, "A Second

Inscription from Phanigiri (Andhrapradesh): Dhaṃmasena's Donation", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology* (ARIRAB), Vol. XV (2012), pp. 3–10.

28 Sen, "Yijing and the Buddhist Cosmopolis", p. 357.

29 The inscription—read as "nayasa vinayadharasa budhino deyadhama" by Santi Pakdeekahm—was originally published in N.S. Ramachandra Murthy, *A Monograph on Nandalur Buddhist Monastic Complex, Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2006, pp. 11–12, 39. It was later republished as EIAD 198. The left portion of the slab with the beginning of the inscription is broken and lost.

30 *Interim Report*, Inscription No. 10, p. 37. The exact reading needs to be confirmed but at present no photographs or estampages are available.

31 For a detailed definition of Pavarana according to Pali sources, see C.S. Upasak, *Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic Terms (Based on Pali Literature)*, Varanasi: Bharati Prakashan, 1975, pp. 147–50. The Chinese pilgrim-scholar Yijing (635–713 AD) describes Pavarana "as an elaborate communal festival, with senior monks delivering protracted dharma lectures throughout the day and night; lamps were lit and flowers and incense offered as laypeople distributed gifts to the entire saṃgha": Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 674. Further references can be found in von Hinüber, "A Second Inscription from Phanigiri", p. 7 and notes. In Thailand today, Pavarana remains one of the major annual monastic rites.

32 For a study of the torana and its position among the toranas in Andhra and elsewhere, see Parul Pandya Dhar, "Piecing a Puzzle: A Unique Toraṇa from Phanigiri, Telangana", *Proceedings of the Second International Seminar, "Telangana through Ages: Perspectives from Early and Medieval Periods", January 18–19, 2018*, edited by Shrikant Ganvir, Hemant Dalavi and Harshada Wirkud, Hyderabad: Department of Heritage Telangana, 2019, pp. 49–63.

33 See Akira Shimada, "Formation of Andhran Buddhist Narrative: A Preliminary Survey", in *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond*, Vol. 1, edited by Peter Skilling and Justin McDaniel, Bangkok: Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2012, pp.17–34.

34 For an early report, now superseded by Dhar's "Piecing a Puzzle", see Peter Skilling, "New Discoveries from South India: The Life of the Buddha at Phanigiri, Andhra Pradesh", *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2008), pp. 96–118. Please note, with my apologies, that my description of the relationship of the crossbar faces is mixed up, and refer rather to Dhar's description and figures.

35 For the story of Mandhatar in Andhra art, see Monika Zin, "Māndhātar, the Universal Monarch, and the Meaning of Representations of the Cakravartin in the Amaravati School, and of the Kings on the Kanaganahalli Stūpa", in *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond*, Vol. 1, pp. 149–64.

36 Peter Skilling, "Relics: The Heart of Buddhist Veneration", in *Relics and Relic Worship in Early Buddhism: India, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Burma*, edited by Janice Stargardt and Michael Willis, London: British Museum Press, 2018, pp. 4–17; idem., "Caitya, Mahācaitya, Tathāgatacaitya: Questions of Terminology in the Age of Amaravati", in *Amaravati: The Art*

of an Early Buddhist Monument in Context, edited by Akira Shimada and Michael Willis, London: British Museum Press, 2016, pp. 23–36.

37 I thank Akira Shimada for sending information, photos and a draft of his paper "Bodhisattva or Yakṣa? A Standing Male Figure from Goli", delivered at the New York Conference on Asian Studies (NYCAS) in October 2019.

38 V.V. Subba Reddy, *Cultural History of Andhra Pradesh from the Earliest Time to 1070 A.D.*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2018, pp. 136–37 and pl. 29. Reddy calls the figure (Shimada IMG 6027) a bodhisatva. Formerly it was kept in Guntur but at present it is displayed in the Kalachakra Museum, Amaravati. The image is 103 cm in height.

39 Acc. No. AM 36/Shimada IMG 2327, height 80 cm and Acc. No. AM 38/ Shimada IMG 2329, height 64 cm.

40 Subba Reddy, *Cultural History of Andhra Pradesh*, pl. 22. For the site, see pp. 134–36. For other slabs, see pls. 19–21, 23–24.

41 S.S. Gupta, *Sculptures and Antiquities in the Archaeological Museum, Amarāvatī*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2008, p. 114, pl. 55, no. 829 and pl. 56, no. 830.

42 Ibid., p. 114, pl. 57, no. 831.

43 "Royal" implies royal parentage, and hence a portrait sculpture, while "regal" refers to dress and bearing but allows for a wider range of identities.

44 Need any figure with lotus in hand be a padmapani, or a Padmapani, with an upper case "p"—or are we beating around the bush?

45 Cult images of massive standing yakshas, some identified by inscriptions, are known from the north and the Vindhyas.

46 Shimada, "Bodhisattva or Yakṣa?".

47 *The Vinaya Piṭakaṃ*, Vol. II, edited by Hermann Oldenberg, London: Pali Text Society, 1880, pp. 147–48; *The Milindapañho*, edited V. Trenckner, London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1928, p. 212.19.

48 *Ajātasattuvihārasaṅkharaṇānisaṃsa vaṇṇanā*, palm-leaf manuscript in the scripture library of Wat Bovaranives, Bangkok. For the literature of benefits, see Peter Skilling, "Ānisaṃsa: Merit, Motivation and Material Culture", *Journal of Buddhist Studies Sri Lanka*, Vol. XIV (2017), pp. 1–56.

49 See Peter Skilling, *Questioning the Buddha: 25 Selected Sūtras*, Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2021 (forthcoming), especially Translation 11, *The Stanza of Dependent Arising*.

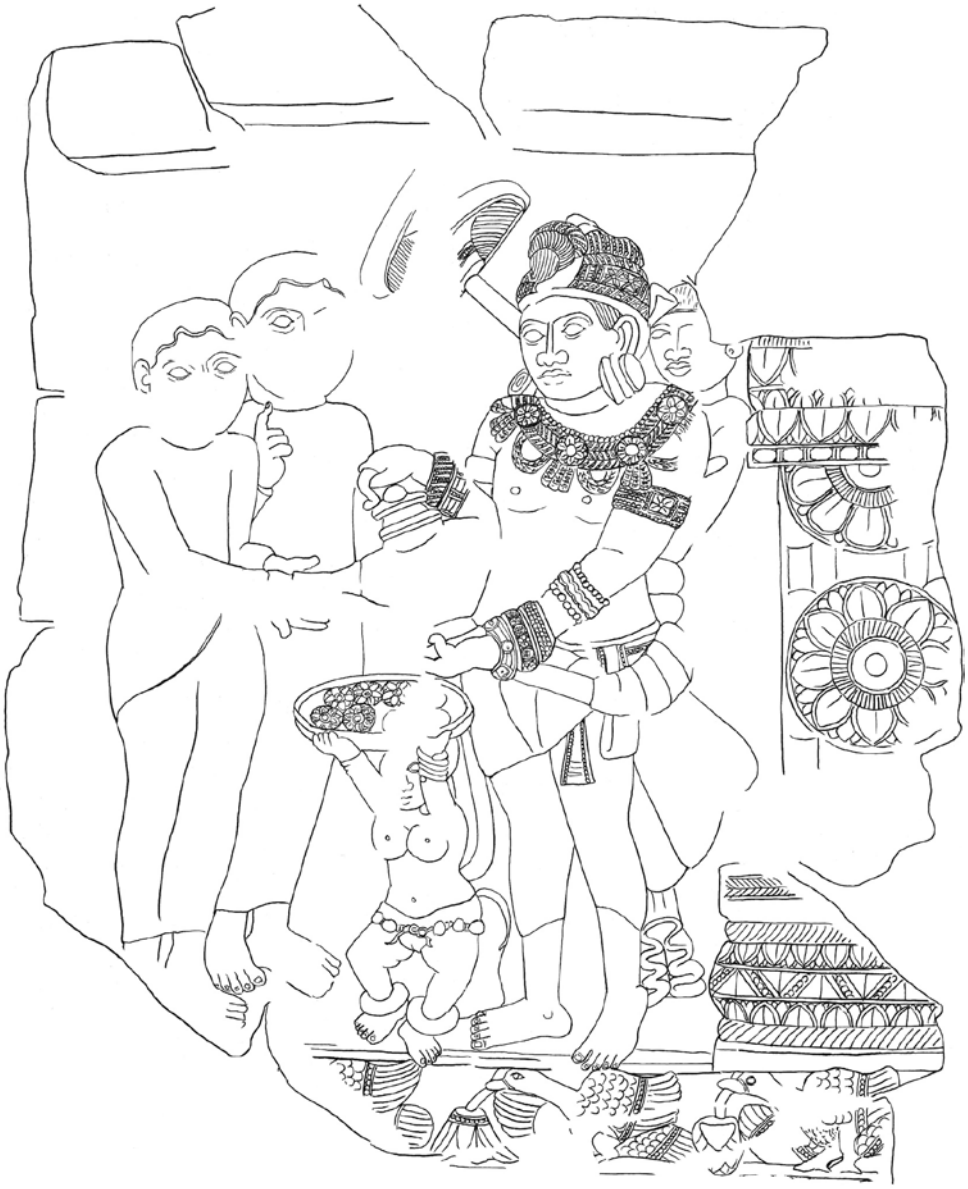
50 See Peter Skilling, '"Every Rise has its Fall': Thoughts on the History of Buddhism in Central India (Part I)", in *Buddhist and Jaina Studies: Proceedings of the Conference in Lumbini, February 2013*, edited by J. Soni, M. Pahlke and C. Cüppers, Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2014, pp. 77–122.

CHAPTER 3

DHARMACHAKRAS, YASHTIS AND YAKSHAS

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PHANIGIRI

John Guy



3.2 and 3.3 King Satakarni donates silver lotus flowers to the Great Chaitya, detail of an inscribed drum panel from the Kanaganahalli mahachaitya, late 1st century AD. Figure 3.2: Courtesy ASI. Figure 3.3: From a line drawing by Monika Zin based on the ASI image.

Previous pages
3.1 Gold and silver flowers and miniature beads from a reliquary deposit excavated near the mahastupa at Phanigiri in January 2015. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

Unlike the metropolis-type landscapes that Amaravati, Kanaganahalli and Nagarjunakonda occupied, Phanigiri represents, in a remarkable state of preservation, the classic model of the monastic establishment in Andhradesha, a relatively small and self-contained community of monks, situated away from urban centres on a hilltop commanding vistas of unrivalled natural beauty. In this regard, it satisfied a central requirement of the Buddha's teachings, that monasteries be places of beauty and quietude that would attract worshippers and their donations. As the *Chivaravastu* recounts, "When he saw the beauties of the *vihara* and the beauties of its woods he was deeply moved, and although he had not seen the monks, he despatched in the name of the Community a very large donation."[1] Unlike Jaggayyapeta, Amaravati, Guntupalli and many other Buddhist monastic sites, which have been largely stripped of their history by villagers intent on securing ready supplies of fired bricks (from the stupa core) and quarried limestone (sculptural elements) that when burnt produced excellent lime plaster, Phanigiri, by contrast,

has remained substantially undisturbed until modern times. The most major historical intervention at the site appears to have been the carefully executed dismantling of the torana and some sculptural elements for "safe storage" in the courtyard area where they were presumably buried for protection by the monastics before permanently abandoning the monastery (cf. figure 6.2). It is referred to only once by name, in a contemporary inscription, as karimahavi[ha]r, "kari Great monastery".[2]

The relative isolation of Phanigiri today and its siting on a high granite outcrop overlooking the Aleru river, a tributary of the Musi, appears to have resulted in its benign neglect. However, when flourishing, it must have been well connected to the Buddhist trade nexus, ensuring a flow of patronage that funded its capital works and sustained its sizable monastic community. Whilst no trace of the reliquary from the mahastupa's core has been discovered and must be assumed to have been plundered long ago, in January 2015 the Telangana Department of Archaeology discovered a red earthenware pot in the northeastern corner of the stupa, buried close to the drum basement. It housed within a silver container 11 miniature beads and three silver and three gold flower petals (figure 3.1). Gold and silver lotus offerings are a well-attested expression of early Buddhist worship in India that continues into modern-day practice in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia. They feature among reliquary finds from other early Buddhist sites in Andhradesha such as Bhattiprolu, Bavikonda and Nagarjunakonda. A caption inscription accompanying a mahachaitya drum panel recently discovered at Kanaganahalli, likely dating to the latter half of the 1st century AD, celebrates the gifting of silver lotus flowers: "King Satakarni donates silver lotus flowers to the Great Chaitya."[3] The associated sculptural panel depicts the king pouring a lustration from a ewer over the hands of a monk, so sealing the contract of giving. Below, a dwarfish female servant holds a tray aloft, presumably displaying the silver lotuses that are in the act of being gifted (figures 3.2 and 3.3). The lotuses are depicted as three-dimensional, a form not preserved in the subcontinent. However, examples of life-size silver lotuses in full-bloom (vikasita padma) were recovered in 1926–27 from the relic chamber at the Khin Ba stupa at Sri Kshetra, Myanmar, the most spectacular examples preserved anywhere in greater South Asia from an early Buddhist relic context (figure 3.4).[4]

3.4 Relic containers in Sarnath as well as other major Buddhist stupas have revealed fragile gold flowers and semi-precious beads carved into auspicious symbols. This silver lotus bloom is from the Khin Ba stupa relic chamber, Sri Kshetra, Myanmar, c. 6th century AD. National Museum of Myanmar, Yangon. Source: John Guy, *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2014.

DHARMACHAKRA STAMBHA

The Buddhist stratums at Phanigiri are homogeneous and indicate a relatively late foundation, from around the 1st century AD and extending into the early to mid-4th century at least. Its boom period for renovation and substantial construction can be anchored to the remarkable pillar inscription dedicated by the chief physician [to the king] (aggrabhisaja) in the 18th year of Rudrapurushadatta, the last recorded ruler of the Ikshvaku dynasty (cf. figures 1.22 and 1.23).[5] This new inscription (EIAD 104) importantly extends his known reign by seven years, the previously recorded inscription being a sculpted pillar at Nagarjunakonda, dedicated in his 11th regnal year, which memorializes his (step)mother Vammabhatta (EIAD 83). Whilst a definitive Ikshvaku chronology awaits further epigraphic evidence, his reign likely falls in the first two decades of the 4th century.[6] The opening stanza of the Phanigiri pillar inscription reads: "Success! In the 18th year, in the 3rd fortnight of winter, on the 3rd day. The chief physician of King Śrī-Rudrapuruṣadatta of well-known blazing fame carried out this erection of a Dharma wheel." And concludes by naming the donor and the monk under whose direction it was erected: "May the world with gods, demons and men know...that this wheel endowed with such qualities is a donation

3.5 Fragment of a dharmachakra excavated in the courtyard zone of Phanigiri around 2004. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: John Guy, 2018.

by Nandiṇṇaka in the pleasure-grove of the Great General, erected for the sake of bringing about his own nirvāṇa, and effected by the Venerable Dhammasena!" The intervening stanzas speak of the intense sectarian rivalries with Shaivism and Vaishnavism, and the power of Buddhism to prevail "by means of this wheel born from the excellent Dharma".

The octagonal faceted pillar stood at 3.54 m and was surmounted by the dharma-wheel spoken of in the inscription. A fragment of a spoked dharmachakra was excavated near one of the apsidal chaityas in the courtyard zone of Phanigiri. Judging by its curvature, it must have exceeded a metre in diameter (figure 3.5).[7] The scale would suggest that this fragment, beautifully decorated with openwork rosette and shrivatsa motifs on the rim and medallion and garland design on the body of the wheel, likely belonged to this same pillar. Elsewhere at Phanigiri, in a roundel scene, we see the depiction of a chakravartin accompanied by his seven jewels, of which the dharma-wheel on pillar is prominently placed (figures 3.6 and 3.7). A larger scale depiction appears on the right side elevation of the turban relic stele (cf. figure 7.9), with detailing that corresponds closely to the rim fragment. This would suggest a similar date for the turban relic stele, somewhere in the later 3rd or early 4th century AD. The same treatment of the wheel is visible on the best preserved Buddhapada from the site. The recovery of multiple Buddhapadas from a single monastic complex (cf. figures 2.5–2.9) suggests that they were placed strategically, particularly in proximity to entrances of chaitya halls and within those halls, thus serving to assert the presence of the Buddha and for monks to be mindful of the Dharma teachings. The recovery of three Buddhapadas from a single shrine is unprecedented.

Unprecedented also in Andhradesha monastic sites is an architectural foundation with an octagonal plan (cf. figures 4.12 and 5.17). Stupas on octagonal platforms are rare in the subcontinent; a few are known from Gandharan sites, including Kalawan near Taxila, and more prominently from eastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. There they are associated with the "Begram III Horizon", assigned to the 4th or 5th century AD, which comfortably coincides with the main building phase of Phanigiri.[8] The appearance of octagonal plan stupas in the Deccan and the northwest underscores other shared traditions of early Buddhist culture of which we have only a rudimentary understanding. Gandhara is, for example, the only other region outside Andhradesha, that has a lingering depiction of dharmachakra stambhas in its later narrative art, the stambha being a regular feature at older sites like Bharhut and Sanchi. Further afield, both octagonal plans for stupas and dharma-wheel pillars are known from Bagan (Myanmar) and from Mon-Dvaravati (Thailand) dating from the mid to late 1st millennium. At least two Mon sites in northeast Thailand, including Muang Fa Daed, preserve stupas with octagonal bases, further evidence of the connectivity between Buddhist Andhradesha and mainland Southeast Asia.[9]

That the Phanigiri monastery was a place of considerable grandeur and beauty is further confirmed by the fragments of the pillars that graced the ayaka platforms, radiating in the cardinal directions from the stupa drum. Some of the fragments preserve donor inscriptions, such as one from the western platform that records the benefaction of "Budhannika, the wife of the notable (gahapati) Tummaka" (EIAD 114). Another, perhaps belonging to a doorjamb, appears to name, again, the venerable Dhammasena, the supervising monastic of the dharma-wheel pillar. Here he is referred to as the one who was responsible, along with his extended family, for the repair of the "broken and shattered (parts)" of an unspecified monastic

3.6 and 3.7 Architectural panel from Phanigiri with a medallion depicting a chakravartin and his seven treasures, including a dharmachakra stambha on the right. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photographs: John Guy, 2015.

structure. A further donation of 150 cows is recorded, the value to be assigned to the Buddha (Bhagavant) as his "own property" (svakanibandha), and to be used for honouring him at the annual Pavarana festival marking Uposatha at the end of the rainy season retreat (varsha), when monks are obliged to perform atonements before their community (sangha) as an act of spiritual cleansing, as prescribed in the Vinaya. The inscription specifies that a flower canopy, and oil and wicks for lamps (dipatelasa) were to be procured by the monks each year, for the cost of six and four

3.8 Architectural panel from Phanigiri with a medallion depicting the *Matakabhatta Jataka.* Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: John Guy, 2015.

gold coins (karshapanas) respectively.[10] All three donor inscriptions found at Phanigiri to date are non-royal, even if the "king's physician" of the pillar inscription clearly moved in elite circles. We are reminded of the Ikshvaku kings and male nobility's strong allegiance to Brahmanism, and of the prominence of women as Buddhist donors, including noble and royal women as seen particularly at Nagarjunakonda.[11]

YASHTI

As remarkable as the three inscribed objects just described are—all large-scale and prominently displayed "public art"—perhaps the most visible object of worship, first sighted by devotees ascending the hill of Phanigiri from the southern approach, was the architectural antefix, the yashti, that adorned the harmika of the stupa and supported the honorific umbrellas (chattras). The mahastupa, 18 m in diameter, occupied the high point of the south side of the ten-acre monastic complex and was of course the principal focus of ritual activity for lay devotees and monastics alike. It was marked by four ayaka platforms, each with a set of commemorative pillars and its dome surmounted by the yashti post (figure 3.9). This emerged at the stupa's apex and supported multiple umbrellas, denoting the successive heavens of the Buddhist cosmology. Its shaft was decorated with a series of stone rings, themselves representing umbrellas, supplanted (we may assume) by actual umbrellas at the

3.9 Fragment of the yashti from the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: John Guy, 2015.

3.10 Details of a mithuna couple and a merman from the yashti fragment of the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: John Guy, 2015.

3.11 Stepped base of the yashti pillar from the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: John Guy, 2015.

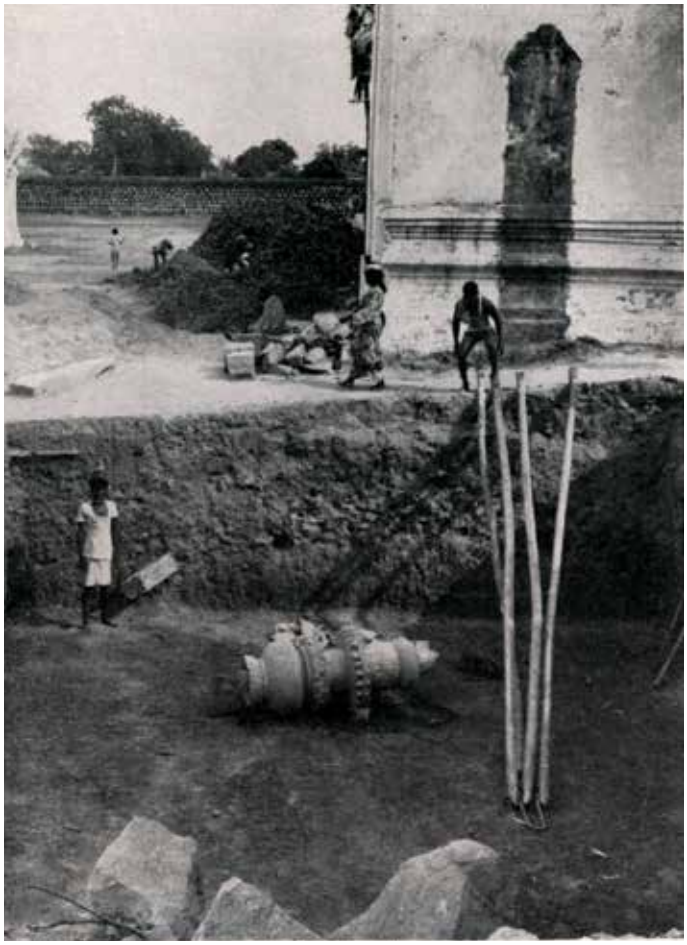
pinnacle. Functioning as a capping stone akin to the amalaka in the Vimana temple-building tradition and located perilously high on the stupa, the yashti of most stupas have, with the stupa's collapse, shattered into unrecognizable parts and been lost. Remarkably, the yashti from Phanigiri has been preserved relatively intact. Further, the lower shaft of this yashti has, protruding from the base, the remains of the rough-cut slender post, broken at an acute angle. This break line appears to correspond with a similarly unfinished shaft of stone projecting from a stepped platform (figure 3.11). This latter element almost certainly served to support the yashti and anchor it within the harmika enclosure. It is square in plan, with seven stepped levels and a ring collar which receives the vertical shaft, set in place with lime cement. The uppermost corners each have a rosette with leaf motif.

The surviving elements of the yashti are as follows: an octagonal lower section which in turn likely rested on one of the surviving floral decorated ring elements, with wondrous panels each bearing a flirtatious mithuna couple presided over by a merman emerging from the jaws of a sea-monster (makara) with a scaled body and long aquatic tail (figure 3.10). Each makara is bifurcated, allowing the corpulent merman to project like some medieval gargoyle. Between the makaras are figures emerging from plant life, each above a couple who embody fecundity. These panels in turn are separated by a column of banded plant forms, each segment bursting from the one below. Garlands hang from fern-like tendrils, yakshas leap forth, and a corpulent yaksha sits astride it all, metamorphosing from the plant life itself (figure 3.12). Immediately above this is a ring element, with dwarfish gana figures interspersed amidst a meandering vine with leaves. This is surmounted by a wider ring, carved on the outer face with lotus medallions, between which are the standard emblems of a dharma-wheel pillar, a tree-shrine (bodhighara) and an entwined serpent (naga). The roughly hewn shaft above would have received further "umbrella" rings, creating an extraordinarily complex crowning antefix for the stupa.

3.13 Ayaka panel detail depicting a yashti with celestial celebrants from Takkellapadu, 1st–2nd century AD (late Satavahana period). Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum (A.M.290). Courtesy Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh. Photograph: John Guy, 2014.

The celebratory spirit of the yashti's decor is in keeping with the devotional practices enacted at such auspicious sites of relic worship. The second Dhammasena inscription at Phanigiri, cited above, contains an important clue to ritual enactment in its record of the gift. It states that the funds must be used in part for the preparation of a flower canopy at the annual Pavarana festival, and that, contractually, the monks must (from this gifted endowment) purchase flowers and lamp oil for this purpose to a specified value (EIAD 105). According to Indologist Oskar von Hinüber, this inscription, c. 300 AD, is the earliest known record of a festival associated with the performance of Pavarana. Another source provides a literary description of this festival. It may be glossed as: "I came and venerated the Lord of the World. Having prepared a canopy of [fully bloomed fragrant] flowers, I raised [it] on the umbrella [on top of the stupa] to pay homage."[12] Further visual verification of such festivals is suggested in the depiction of a yashti on an ayaka panel from the stupa site at Takkellapadu, Andhra Pradesh (figure 3.13). Here an "endless column" design, with acanthus-leaf banding at intervals, supports a large umbrella from which sprouts a tripartite candelabra composed of flowers with pendant garlands, mimicking in its

3.12 Detail of a foliate panel from the yashti fragment of the Phanigiri mahastupa. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.



3.14 Yashti from a 3rd-century Satavahana/Ikshvaku-period stupa at Amaravati, excavated from the grounds of the Sri Amareswara Swamy temple in the 1970s. Source: P. Sitapati and V.V. Krishna Sastry, *New Satavahana Sculptures from Andhra Amaravathi*, Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1980.

configuration the triple dharma-wheels seen in depictions of dharmachakra stambhas from Mathura and Gandhara. A host of celestial celebrants hover about the umbrella. Another yashti with multiple umbrellas is clearly depicted, together with heavenly celebrants, on a drum panel excavated from Nagarjunakonda Stupa 3. Here it is shown rising from the harmika enclosure, with garlands hanging from the umbrellas and flying worshippers holding wind-swept banner-standards (cf. figure 7.13). We can readily visualize these majestic antefixes adorned with umbrellas festooned with flowers in full bloom. Given so little knowledge has come down to us of the celebratory life of early Buddhism, such glimpses that are provided in the Phanigiri inscriptional account of the Pavarana festival give us new insights, however fleeting, of a lived faith in the early 4th century, otherwise lost to us.

The Phanigiri mahastupa's yashti is rivalled only by one belonging to the Satavahana period, excavated in the 1970s at Amaravati. It was recovered by chance, at a depth of over 2 m, whilst excavations were underway for laying foundations for a new gopuram for the Sri Amareswara Swamy temple (figure 3.14).[13] This famed medieval temple was evidently built directly over the remains of a stupa sited on the banks of the Krishna river, a kilometre or so north of the great Amaravati mahachaitya. It is currently exhibited in the forecourt of the Archaeology Museum at Amaravati (figure 3.15). It is a masterpiece of the late Satavahana sculptor's art, brilliantly imagined and exuberantly carved.

ARCHITECTURAL DECOR

A unique feature at Phanigiri is the apparent use of large architectural panels seemingly not connected to the decoration of the stupa or its ayaka platforms. This places them in an unusual category. They resemble vedika elements in their organization, notably pilasters with large lotus medallions serving as the crossbars (suchi). But on current evidence, the mahastupa did not have a pradakshina railing; no independent posts or crossbars have been recovered in its vicinity, nor in the courtyard zone where many major architectural elements were discovered buried.

Phanigiri's monastic site displays extensive use of dressed and sculpted limestone mouldings, curbings, moonstones (chandrashila) and low balustrades marking the pavements and staircases that link the apsidal shrines, congregational halls and monastic cells. This degree of embellishment is an indicator of the wealth of a monastery, and Phanigiri appears to have been particularly well endowed by its patrons. Beyond the mahastupa itself, the ritual centre of the monastery appears to have been located in the courtyard which served as the axis linking the mahastupa and memorial chaityas at the southern entrance, leading on a northern axis to the smaller mandapa hall and the two large apsidal shrines (cf. figures 4.1 and 4.7–4.10).[14] This courtyard zone is distinguished by a series of changes of levels required by the naturally undulating hilltop setting, differing levels accessed by

limestone steps and the resulting terracing supported by fired bricks walls dressed with large limestone pilaster and lotus medallion panels.

In the course of the excavation campaigns undertaken between 2001–07, major architectural and sculptural elements were recovered. A large panel with a lotus medallion (figure 3.16) is one of a number that served, as best as we can judge from the excavation photographs, to partition the courtyard space, with a double set of stairs leading to apsidal Chaityagriha 1 and a single set to Chaityagriha 2, each marked with a plain moonstone. Three such panels, double-sided, with the pilaster section serving as the overlapping element to lock into the adjoining panel, are visible in the excavation photographs of the 2002–03 season.[15] The dominant motifs between the pilasters are two medallions, the lower a magnificent lotus bloom, with four concentric rings of petals radiating from the seed box at the centre, and the upper roundel containing a Buddhist narrative framed by a double ring of lotus petals. Two fragmentary panels survive, one depicting a chakravartin accompanied by his seven jewels, possibly intended as a depiction of the *Mandhata-avadana* (see figures 3.6 and 3.7; cf. figure 7.25), the other likely referencing the *Matakabhatta Jataka* which recounts the story of the offering of the goat sacrifice for the feast of the dead (figure 3.8).[16] The lotus is raised against a solid back panel, without any openwork as seen in panels intended for vedikas. The spandrels of the lotus are framed by blue lotus buds and a flamboyant border of acanthus-leaf foliage, providing a platform for dancing celebrants. That these are nature-spirit personifications is not only suggested by their placement amidst virulent plant forms but, as seen here, one garuda-like figure is eagle-headed and winged, demonstrating his avian nature and solar associations (figure 3.17).

3.15 Yashti excavated from the Sri Amareswara Swamy temple installed in the grounds of the Archaeological Museum, Amaravati. Photograph: John Guy.

THE PRINCELY YAKSHA

Phanigiri has also yielded what is arguably the most spectacularly beautiful in-the-round sculpture yet discovered in Andhradesha, a bejewelled male figure (figures 3.18–3.20). It is a singular masterpiece of Ikshvaku sculpture. It was unearthed during the 2004 excavations, standing upright, leaning against one of the pilasters and lotus medallion panels in the lower courtyard adjoining the two smaller apsidal shrines of the monastery (cf. figures 4.35 and 4.36). Whether this approximates its original location is unknown. The two-thirds life-size figure, bedecked in princely accoutrements, raised questions as to its identity from the outset. That it is not a royal personage is clear, the flexed posture and placement of the lower hand on the hip is inconsistent with the attitude of reverent humility that even kings must assume when at worship. He is bejewelled in a princely manner befitting high rank or divinity. We cannot dismiss the notion that we may be witnessing here one of the earliest expressions of bodhisatva imagery in the Deccan, but on our current understanding of the circulation of Mahayanist concepts in the southern regions at this time, this seems unlikely. Personified nature-spirit deities—yakshas—deployed in the service of Buddhism, present a more credible identification. Nonetheless,

3.16 Fragment of a courtyard enclosure panel with lotus medallions and celebrants from Phanigiri. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: John Guy, 2015.

lotus-bearing yaksha imagery, which had such a strong presence in the Deccan, can be seen as providing an important prototype for attendant male figures that came to assume a bodhisatva identity in succeeding centuries.

The figure is flexed in a manner which suggests that it was one of a pair of mirrored sculptures which may have stood flanking an entrance to a sacred space. As such, its role would have been one of guardianship, similar to the protectors of thresholds that guard the gateways at Sanchi Stupa 1 (c. 50 AD) and at Kanheri Cave 3 (c. 170 AD) among other sites. Monks making regular devotional circumambulation of the monastery's mahastupa would almost certainly have had to pass through a towering gateway (torana), substantial fragments of which were recovered in this zone (see Parul Pandya Dhar's chapter herein). This would have served to mark the transition from the monk's residential zone in the north to that of the relic sanctuary, the stupa. Flanking the stairs on this pathway, or those leading up to the two apsidal shrines orientated immediately to the west, these spaces would have served as

appropriate locations for such a pair of figures. The posture of this male recalls the mahapurusha (Great Man) imagery favoured in early Buddhism, symmetrically poised with feet firmly placed apart, lower right hand akimbo, with the slight tilting of the shoulders suggesting that his left arm was raised. In a Buddhist setting, such figures routinely held aloft a lotus bloom, as witnessed in the examples that follow. These features make a compelling case for this figure belonging to a long lineage of local yakshas.

3.17 Detail of an eagle-headed and winged celebrant from a lotus panel at Phanigiri. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

3.18–3.20 Male figure, possibly a yaksha, excavated from the courtyard zone of Phanigiri in 2004. The details show the elaborate design of the waist cord and hip girdle. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photographs: John Guy, 2014.

3.21 and 3.22 Male torsos, possibly yakshas, from Tirumalagiri, 3rd–4th century AD (Ikshvaku period). Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum (AM 38 and 36 respectively). Courtesy Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh. Photographs: John Guy.

3.23 Yaksha panel from Kotta Nandayapalem, 3rd–4th century AD (Ikshvaku period). Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum. Courtesy Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh. Photograph: John Guy.

3.24 and 3.25 Yaksha panel from Goli with detail of a gana, early 3rd century AD (Satavahana period). Government Museum, Chennai. Photographs: John Guy.

3.26 Detail of a stupa panel from Nagarjunakonda, 3rd–4th century AD (Ikshvaku period). ASI Archaeology Museum, Nagarjunakonda (ACC-64). Courtesy ASI. Photograph: John Guy, 2017.

Though undoubtedly the most beautiful and complete figure in-the-round known to date, this sculpture is not without precedent. At least two similarly scaled male torsos are known, both flexed and with one hand resting on the hip, with a garment sash looped at the front and secured with pendant toggles, features all shared with the Phanigiri figure. Both were recovered at Tirumalagiri in the vicinity of the Gajulabanda monastery, around 4 km from Phanigiri and likely functioned as a pair (figures 3.21 and 3.22).[17] Traces of the hand on hip appear on the left and right side respectively of the presumed pair. Further similarities to the Phanigiri figure can be seen in the elaborate treatment of the waist sash and hip girdle, sharing a new sophistication in the rendering of such accoutrements. These details point to a shared workshop tradition in the region, suggesting a mobility of sculptors who moved between monasteries as commissions demanded. Such workshop practices can be witnessed elsewhere in the region, as for example appears to be the case between Chandavaram and Dupadu, linked by the Gundlakamma river system.

The closest stylistic parallels to the Phanigiri figure however can be traced not to a free-standing figural sculpture but to a spectacular stupa or drum or ayaka panel from the site of Kotta Nandayapalem in Guntur district. It depicts a hero-figure standing robustly, mahapurusha-like, attended by four gana-like dwarves, one holding an umbrella aloft, another a vessel, and the remaining two with hands clasped in reverence (figure 3.23). Each wears pendant ear ornaments and has hair configured in a variety of top-knots. The hero holds aloft a large lotus bloom in his raised hand and rests his lower hand on the hip. He wears a headdress with a large frontal cockade and rich ornaments, including large discal ear ornaments (kundala) with pendant elements, likely intended to represent strands of pearls. Close comparison can be made with the Phanigiri male's configuration of the waist cords,

looping to mid-thigh and secured with a toggle at the waistband (see figures 3.18 and 3.19). These sculptures share conventions that clearly unite them as a stylistic group, linked geographically and in time.[18]

Further comparison can be made with the great mahapurusha-type guardian offering a lotus bloom, recovered from the Goli stupa site in 1926 (figure 3.24).[19] It is the most imposing of the lotus-bearing guardians, a sculpture of commanding

presence. The figure stands akimbo, with his raised hand displaying affirmatively the lotus offering. He is richly adorned, with heavy earrings, a torque and a head-cloth surmounted by a prominent cockade displaying a frontally-viewed eagle, an emblem with solar associations and a recurring motif in the railing panels at Phanigiri. Importantly, he is flanked by two ganas who assert his divine status by honouring him with an umbrella and flywhisk, shared emblems of royalty and whose presence point to his identity. These dwarfish attendants both display distinctive pointed ears (figure 3.25). This is a defining characteristic of yakshas and ganas, as already seen in the 2nd century BC Pitalkhora Cave 3 in the Western Ghats and in Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh. The ganas are expressively grotesque, with broad features, flared noses and bulging eyes. Their diadems mimic those of their master, and one wears large bells with clappers hanging from his earlobes.

The Goli yaksha, martial in posture, draws on a long tradition of kingly figures that have crossed over into the realm of divinities, as developed in the northern tradition at Mathura in the first two centuries AD and represented most famously by the "Monk Bala Buddha" found at Sarnath.[20] What is new, and startling however, is that this yaksha displays in his raised hand a bouquet of lotuses in bloom. This is the quintessential Buddhist offering, available to all, rich and poor. But something else is happening here. In assuming this role as a divine devotee of the Buddha with flowers as his identifier, we are arguably witnessing the beginnings of a bodhisatva cult imagery that was crystallizing in Buddhist practice. In Mathuran Buddhist art at this time and slightly earlier, Buddhas were represented with a pair of flanking flywhisk attendants. Soon they were to assume specific iconographies as identifiable bodhisatvas.[21] Canonical sources such as the *Sutta Nipata* speak of a white parasol held aloft by angels over the "bodhisatva".[22] However, the presence of gana attendants points to the protective worshipper being identified as an important yaksha, likely specific to the place. Precisely how they were understood by Buddhist worshippers of the day remains an open question. Monika Zin's recent study of yakshas at Ajanta, less than two centuries later than Phanigiri, observes that the yaksha-type figures at a number of cave entrances display Buddhist emblems in their crowns, seemingly conflating yaksha and bodhisatva imagery, or at least asserting the Buddhist allegiance of yakshas in a new and more overtly explicit way.[23]

A drum panel from Nagarjunakonda affirms the continuity of the lotus-bearing yaksha tradition of Andhradesha, and makes clear the likely siting of the Kotta Nandayapalem and Goli panels: the yaksha is located so as to be visible to the approaching devotee through the primary pradakshina entrance (figure 3.26). He holds aloft a lotus bloom and is attended by venerating ganas bearing offerings. Such deified spirits were worshipped by name and these were on occasion recorded by inscription, as seen at Bharhut and Pitalkhora.[24] Regrettably we do not have a name for these yakshas, nor for those at Phanigiri.

THE MONASTIC YAKSHA

Careful excavation at Phanigiri in April 2019 revealed yet another astonishing and unprecedented find—a life-size yaksha in stucco (figure 3.27–3.29). The surviving figure, lost from mid-thigh, stands at 174 cm, indicating a life-size scaled figure, constructed of fine stucco plaster over a coarse rubble core. This yaksha has a powerful physique, swelling stomach and wears a dhoti with a sash that loops to the knees. He also has heavy upper armbands of hinged construction, bracelets, a diadem with a central jewel setting and a large cockade above, framing a now

lost device. The forehead and eyes are well preserved and reveal an astonishing quality of artistry (figure 3.28). The heavy bracelet preserved on his akimbo arm, distinguished by square hinged sections with raised or inset design (figure 3.29), directly echoes that worn by the Goli figure (see figure 3.24) and that of the other life-size stone yaksha found at Phanigiri (see figure 3.18). Further parallels can be drawn with the frontal cockade of the headdresses, which are directly analogous to those seen in the yakshas of Kotta Nandayapalem (see figure 3.23) and Goli. This common vocabulary would suggest that this ensemble shared a period of evolution, likely spanning the early 3rd to early 4th century AD. The Phanigiri stucco yaksha originally stood near the perimeter of the northeastern zone in the vicinity of the pair of apsidal shrines and between two sets of monastic cells. Excavation photographs indicate that it likely occupied a small brick cell, serving as a yaksha shrine within the private quarters of the monastery (figure 3.30; cf. figure 4.18). This location is significant because it points to the status of yaksha cults among monastics and not just the Buddhist laity as generally assumed. The presence of small yaksha shrines within monasteries are recorded elsewhere, including at the Ghoshitarama monastery at Kaushambi where an enthroned terracotta yaksha was recovered in association with a so-called Hariti shrine.[25] A contemporary Buddhist medieval text, *Mahamayuri Vidyarajni Sutra*, provides an inventory of named yakshas and the places where they resided and were worshipped.[26] Unfortunately it is orientated to the Gangetic region and northern sites and so sheds little light on the identities of Andhradesha yakshas. This newly found yaksha is the most spectacularly sized example of stucco imagery to survive from Phanigiri, or indeed any other Buddhist site in Andhradesha to date.

His yaksha nature is asserted by not only his powerful physique but also his bulbous stomach, a feature of the earliest known types from Mathura and Besnagar (modern Vidisha), and a defining feature of Kubera ("the ill-shaped one"), the supreme yaksha and overlord of the ganas.[27] One is tempted to ask the question: is it coincidental that this yaksha shrine was located in the northern quarter of the Phanigiri monastic complex? This is the direction over which Kubera presides as a dikpala, a guardian role he has fulfilled since at least the creation of the Bharhut railing, c. 150–100 BC, where he is first named in this role. Yakshas survive in various fragmentary states at Kanaganahalli, sited at the cardinal directions, seemingly serving as protective presences at points of entry to the circumambulatory passage.[28] The discovery of this stucco yaksha links Phanigiri to a wider monastic practice of incorporating nature-deity shrines within monastic complexes.

The monumental yaksha panels of Kotta Nandayapalem and Goli, and the free-standing figural sculptures from Tirumalagiri and Phanigiri presented here all lack archaeological contexts which would tell us their precise architectural setting. However, their presence may be understood as both honorific and protective in that they submit to the authority of Buddha's Dharma and align their formidable powers with those of the new religion. Taken as a group, these male deities, all standing akimbo and holding aloft a bunch of lotuses in bloom, may be understood as marking an exceptional moment in early Buddhist iconography, the alignment of the cult of yakshas to Buddhism. Furthermore, they provide the sculptural prototype for the emerging Mahayanist concept of the Buddhist saviour, the bodhisatva. In this, as in so many other respects, the monastic site of Phanigiri provides signs of great artistic innovation in the late Ikshvaku period, that sets it apart from the art of the Ikshvaku capital, Vijayapuri, later known as Nagarjunakonda.

3.30 Excavation of a yaksha shrine in the eastern side of the northernmost zone of Phanigiri in April 2019. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

POSTSCRIPT

What of the fate of the monastery at Phanigiri? Instances of post-Ikshvaku patronage, including royal support from their successors, the Vishnukundin, enter the discussion here. In the 5th century, several of these rulers, according to their donative inscriptions, articulated a vision of kingship based on a Bodhisatvayana ideology of bodhisatva-kings expressed through Buddhist giving. As Vincent Tournier has recently demonstrated, "the Viṣṇukuṇḍin record a clear expression of a Bodhisattva ideology consistent with that articulated in Mahāyāna scriptures."[29] Notwithstanding these late displays of royal Buddhist ideology, Andhra Buddhism was in a state of gradual but terminal decline by the second half of the 1st millennium. In the 640s the Chinese pilgrim-monk Xuanzang visited the Vishnukundin capital of Vengipura in Godavari district and noted "more than twenty monasteries with over 3000 monks", no doubt bolstered by royal patronage in the vicinity of the capital; but elsewhere in the south he observed numerous monasteries, "most of them deserted".[30]

What exactly happened at Phanigiri? So purposefully have the major architectural and sculptural elements been disassembled and stored in the courtyard zone below the two nearby apsidal chaitya halls that one can reasonably speculate that this was undertaken by the sangha in order to protect their sacred images when they were obliged to abandon the monastery. It is difficult otherwise to explain the systematic and ordered manner in which these monumental sculpted elements had been placed, without overt damage or iconoclasm, and then buried for protection. This action was likely taken in response to a decline in popular support from the neighbouring communities upon whom they depended, perhaps further aggravated by a decline in mercantile patronage. A diminished and increasingly impoverished sangha must have finally abandoned the site, perhaps to be taken in by another monastic community or, more probably, disbanded altogether, some to embark on lives as wandering mendicants.

3.27–3.29 Yaksha excavated from the northernmost zone of Phanigiri in April 2019. The details show its crowned head and arm bracelets. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

ENDNOTES

1 Gregory Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004, p. 33.

2 *Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa* (EIAD) 117. This online corpus, mainly compiled and edited by Stefan Baums, Arlo Griffiths, Ingo Strauch and Vincent Tournier, is a publication of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (Paris, France), realized in collaboration with the HiSoMA Research Centre (Lyon, France) and hosted by TGIR Huma-Num (France), http://hisoma.huma-num.fr/exist/apps/EIAD/index2.html.

3 Oskar von Hinüber, "Again on the Donation made by the Vinayadhara Dhammasena and on Other Inscriptions from Phanigiri", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2012*, Vol. XVI (2013), pp. 3–12. The author suggests a likely identification with Gautamiputra Satakarni (c. 60–90 AD).

4 John Guy, *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 80–82, Cat. No. 28.

5 This discovery extends the duration of his reign, previously known only to extend to 11 years. This also demands a revision of later Ikshvaku chronology. Absolute dates remain uncertain.

6 EIAD 104 more conservatively assigns this to a date range between 300 and 350 AD.

7 The fragment is currently displayed in the State Museum at Madhapur, Hyderabad.

8 I am indebted to Dr Luca Olivieri, Director of the Italian Archaeological Mission to Pakistan (ISMEO) for these insights on Buddhist architecture in the northwest. For the reference, see Shoshin Kuwayama, "The Horizon of Begram III and Beyond: A Chronological Interpretation of the Evidence for Monuments in the Kāpiśī-Kabul-Ghazni Region", *East and West*, Vol. 41, No. 1/4 (1991), pp. 79–120.

9 Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, pp. 19–21. I am grateful to Stephen Murphy who accompanied me to these sites in 2012.

10 Oskar von Hinüber, "A Second Inscription from Phanigiri (Andhrapradesh): Dhaṃmasena's Donation", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2011*, Vol. XV (2012), pp. 3–10. See also EIAD 105.

11 D.C. Sircar, "More Inscriptions from Nagarjunakonda", *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 35 (1963–1964), pp. 1–36.

12 Hinüber, "A Second Inscription from Phanigiri", pp. 3–10. Of similar date is the Veherekama rock inscription in Sri Lanka (see Senarat Paranavitana and Malini Dias, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. II, Part II, Colombo: Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka, 2001, p. 264).

13 P. Sitapati and V.V. Krishna Sastry, *New Satavahana Sculptures from Andhra Amaravathi*, Archaeological Series, No. 54, Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1980, p. 7, pls. 1719.

14 B. Subrahmanyam, J. Vijaya Kumar, G.V. Ramakrishna Rao and K.S.B. Kesava, *Phanigiri: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh, An Interim Report, 2001–07*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2008, p. 14 (ground plan of the Phanigiri monastic complex).

15 Ibid., pp. 16–18.

16 It is contentious to argue that all such depictions of chakravartins and their seven attributes of office are representations of the *Mandhavata-avadana* or its jataka

equivalent. They can equally be as simply as they appear, images of the universal sovereign.

17 I am grateful to Akira Shimada for confirming with the Telangana Department of Archaeology records that the second torso (AM. 36) was also recovered from Tirumalagiri.

18 To these can be added two more rudimentary and smaller scale figures excavated from late levels at Amaravati, displayed at the site's Archaeology Museum.

19 It was transferred to the Government Museum, Chennai, shortly thereafter and published in T.N. Ramachandran, *Sculptures from a Stupa near Goli Village, Guntur District*, Madras: Government Press, 1929, pl. IX, no. 6.

20 John Guy, *Indian Temple Sculpture*, London: V&A Publications, 2007, p. 20, fig. 12.

21 See D. Barrett, "The Later School of Amaravati and Its Influences", *Art and Letters*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 (1954), pp. 41–53 for this late phase of development in Andhradesha.

22 O.C. Gangoly, *Andhra Sculptures*, Archaeological Series, No. 36, Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1973 (Reprint 2016), p. 81. Note that the term "bodhisatva/ bodhisattva" is also applied in early Buddhist literature as an epithet for the historical Buddha.

23 Monika Zin, "Prosperity in this World Instead of Nirvāna", *Sahapedia*, April 25, 2016, https://www.sahapedia.org/prosperity-world-instead-of-nirv%C4%81%E1%B9%87a (accessed December 22, 2020).

24 Regarding Pitalkhora, see V.S Agrawala, "Geographical Contents of the Mahamayuri", *Journal of the UP Historical Society*, No. 15 (1942), pp. 24–52.

25 G.R. Sharma, "Excavations at Kauśāmbī 1949–1955", *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology for the Years 1948–1953*, Vol. 16, Leiden: Kern Institute, 1958, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

26 For extant recension attributed to the 3rd–4th centuries AD, see Agrawala, "Geographical Contents of the Mahamayuri", pp. 24–52.

27 Guy, *Indian Temple Sculpture*, p. 18, fig. 7.

28 K.P. Poonacha, *Excavations at Kanaganahalli (Sannati), Taluk Chitapur, Dist. Gulbarga, Karnataka*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2011, pp. 99–100.

29 Vincent Tournier, "A Tide of Merit. Royal Donors, Tāmraparṇīya Monks, and the Buddha's Awakening in 5th–6th-Century Āndhradeśa", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, No. 61 (2018), pp. 20–30.

30 Rongxi Li, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research, 1996, pp. 313–15. Vengipura passed on to Chalukyan control in 624 AD and Buddhism's decline in the region likely accelerated thereafter.

CHAPTER 4

PHANIGIRI'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL LABYRINTH

A GUIDE TO THE SITE

N.R. Visalatchy

Place names are by themselves revelations. Most of the time they are an interplay between ecology, geology, sociology, etymology and history. The name Phanigiri is made of two Sanskrit words—"phani" and "giri"—meaning "snake" and "hill", respectively. There is an obvious sense of space and shape in this name as the hillock looks like a coiled snake ready to raise its hood. This abstraction is more pronounced in aerial photography. The serpent is a sacred icon in Buddhist iconography. In *Udana*, one of the earliest texts of Buddhism, a chapter is dedicated to Muchalinda, the naga king who protects the Gracious One while he is meditating under the bodhi tree. This association seems to add further meaning to the name Phanigiri. Naming Buddhist aramas after the serpent is not alien to Andhradesha. Another hilltop site at Guntupalli, Andhra Pradesh, was called Mahanagaparvata (Hill of the Great Serpent). Therefore, it could well be that a site like Phanigiri was known as such from its early days. No ancient inscriptional evidence backing this has so far been found in the excavations; but it is intriguing to note the frequent appearance of "phani" in people's names in this part of India.[1]

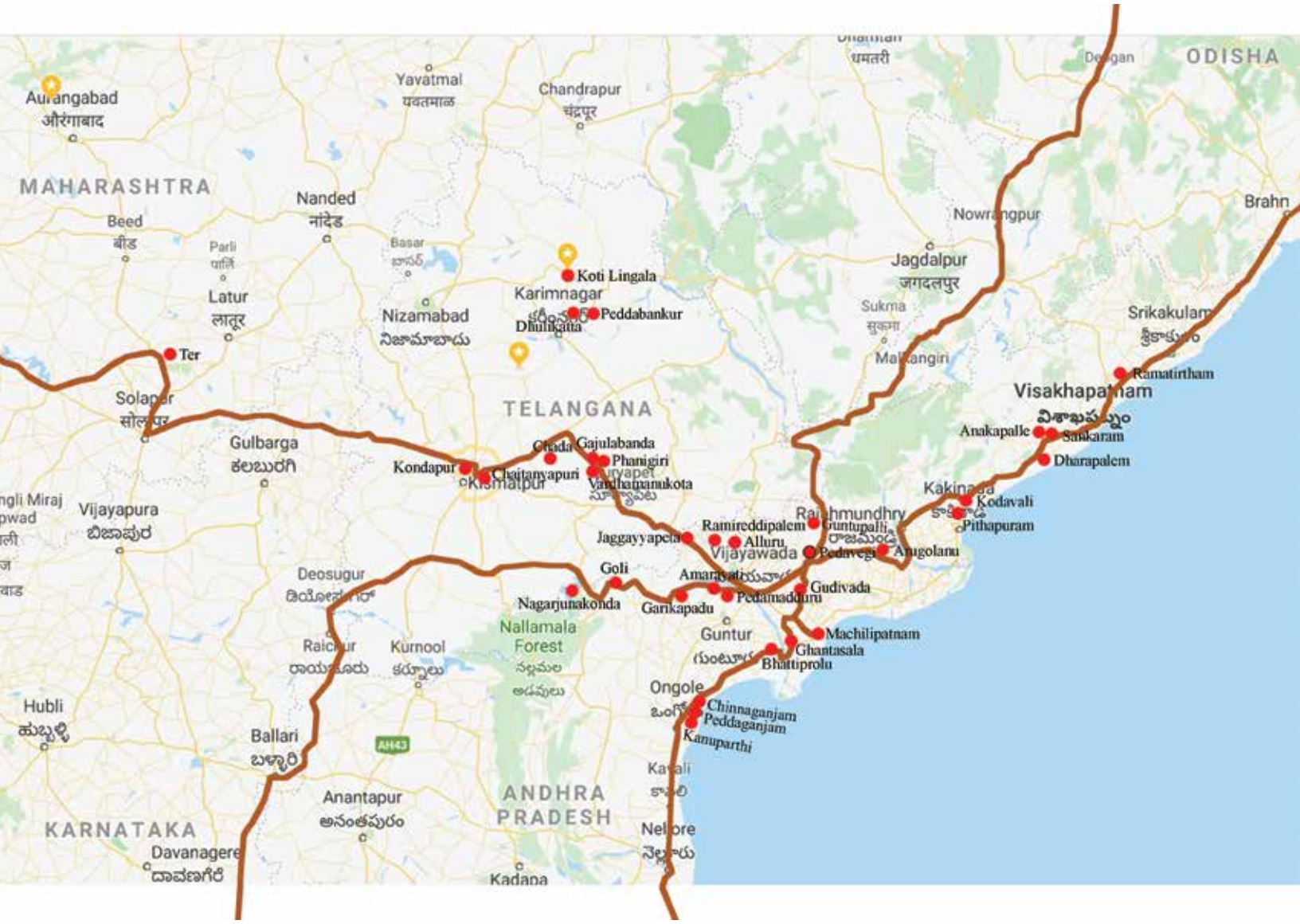
GEOLOGICAL ROOTS AND GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Geologically, Telangana is part of the Southern Precambrian Tectonic Province or the Southern Peninsular Shield.[2] The components are describable under the Eastern Tectonic Block (ETB) of the Dharwar Craton. The Buddhist site at Phanigiri is located atop a granitoid litho-unit (figure 4.1). The granite rocks in the state fall under the Peninsular Gneissic Complex (PGC) and the ones at Phanigiri are attributed to PGC II which evolved between 2550–2600 million years. The Intracratonic Cuddapah Basin is 95 km south of Phanigiri. This super group of rocks belonging to the Cuddapah Basin vis-a-vis the Papaghni and Nallamalai groups were exposed in parts of Nalgonda district. The litho-units used in construction at Phanigiri belong to sedimentary rocks of the Cuddapah Basin such as quartzite, dolomite and slate. Proximity to the source is the reason for extensive use of these stones in Phanigiri.

As can be seen in the map in figure 4.2, Phanigiri is surrounded by a number of early historic settlements and Buddhist kshetras. At a distance of 5.3 km on the northwest, there is the hilltop site of Gajulabanda where remains of a stupa and apsidal chaitya have been found; and at 7.5 km southwest, there is the village of Vardhamanukota which has yielded votive stupas and two chaityagrihas. Phanigiri, in its early days, must have thrived under the growing urbanization in its surroundings. Its sculpted panels and inscriptions are proof of its once indomitable status in this locality.

Phanigiri's geographical orientation and location also gave it several advantages with regard to gaining support from pilgrimage, trade and political alliances. It was close to the ancient Buddhist route running through central India which connected the east and west coasts and regions in the north and south: this is the route through which Buddhism entered Andhradesha during the lifetime of the Buddha. The *Sutta Nipata* mentions Bavari, a Brahman dwelling on the banks of the Godavari in Assaka (Asmaka Janapada) in the neighbourhood of Alaka (Mulaka Janapada),[3] who sent his 16 disciples to meet the Enlightened One. They went from Patitana (Pratishthana or Paithan) via Mahissati (Mahishmati), Ujjeni (Ujjain) and Kaushambi to Pasanaka where they met the Buddha.[4] This same route was later used to visit Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati through Koti Lingala and Dhulikatta.[5] After the third Buddhist council, the Mahasanghikas reached the lower Krishna valley from Pataliputra through Orissa.[6] They must have subsequently spread to areas closer

Previous pages
4.1 Aerial view of the overall site showing the layout of the Phanigiri monastic complex. Latitude: 17.428055, Longitude: 79.472383.



to the left bank of the Krishna and further into the Krishna-Godavari basin. While Phanigiri was oriented to Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati in its doctrine, art and architecture, it simultaneously preserved its link with central India through this pilgrimage route. Nearly 400 years of Satavahana rule which successfully held these parts together, and later matrimonial alliances forged with Ujjain[7] by the Ikshvakus who succeeded the Satavahanas, also helped keep alive these ties with central India.

4.2 Map showing Phanigiri's location on the ancient trade and pilgrimage route that connected it with various other early Buddhist sites of Andhradesha as well as important port cities such as Sopara on the west coast and Masolia (Machilipatnam) on the east coast.

APPROACH TO THE SITE

The S-shaped hill at Phanigiri has a north-south orientation and tapers down on its southern and northeastern ends. The central part of the hill has an altitude of about 200 ft. A precipitous drop towards the edge in the central portion makes it not scalable. Therefore, the better negotiable approaches are the slow ascends on the northeastern and southern sides. The path which is currently used to reach the hilltop starts next to the late medieval Vaishnavite temple at the foot of the hill.

4.3 Mechanical weathering caused exfoliation on the surface of Phanigiri hill which eased the work of early quarriers. One can still see leftover blocks chiselled from the exfoliating layers.

However, there is another path on the southern side which must have been used by the residents and visitors in ancient times. This is evident from the stone pavements found along the narrow passage between the main hill and its tinier southern extension which provides a slow ascend leading to a junction-like area. From this junction, the line of sight in the northwest direction leads one to the hill at Gajulabanda. Located on the southern side are the remnants of the basements of a hall and a votive stupa [built on a random rubble masonry (RRM) foundation] measuring 25 x 25 m and 6 x 6 m, respectively. There might have been more votive stupas, but these have been dislocated beyond recognition. Further south is the Vaishnavite dvikutalayam belonging to the Kakatiya period. One can take the northern ascend from this junction and the pathway leads the visitor directly to the mahastupa on the hilltop. This was the route the pilgrims would have taken while travelling between Gajulabanda, Vardhamanukota and Phanigiri. This old route is no longer used as the entry point and is covered with vegetation. This would lead us to think that the access path changed to the current one when the hub of activity shifted from the southern votive stupas to the northeastern Vaishnavite temple. While climbing along this path, one now finds remains of three other square platforms with traces of votive stupas on them. Their foundations are also of RRM; they take the natural incline of the hill, receiving support on the north and are built up on three directions. The large amount of stone used was quarried from the hill itself.

Mechanical weathering which caused exfoliation to the surface of the hill eased the work of these early quarriers (figure 4.3).

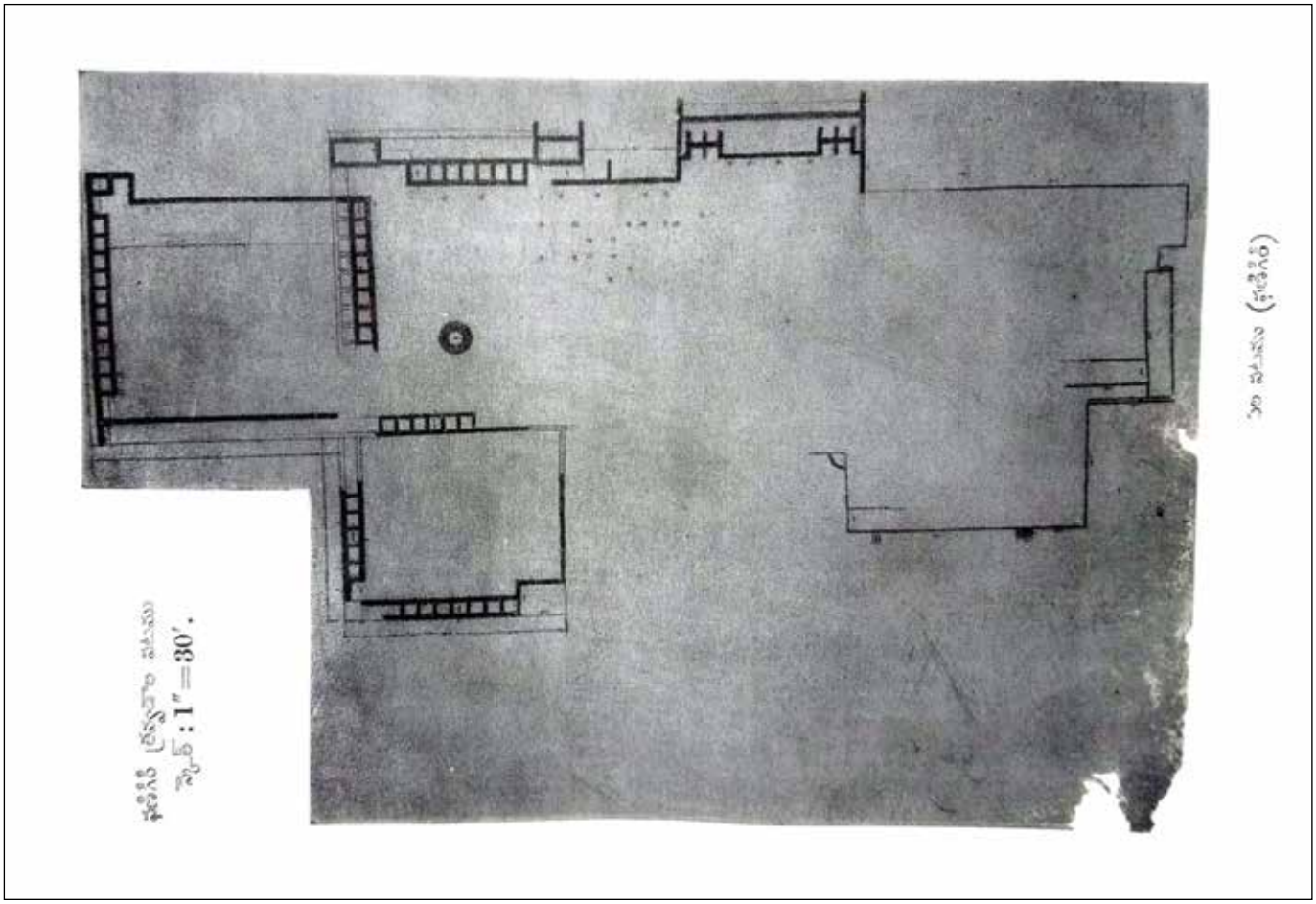
HISTORY OF EXCAVATION AT THE SITE

Phanigiri was declared a protected monument under Section 3 of the Hyderabad Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1337.F (VIII of 1337.F) by the Rajpramukh, Vide Notification No. 49/1/111/Arch/51 published in the *Hyderabad Government Gazette* on Thursday, June 11, 1953. The earliest available report on Phanigiri from 1942 proffers that the site was plundered during an anti-Buddhist revolution. The report mentions profuse usage of limestone and its "removal" from the place. All that remained in 1942 were some lower portions of the vertical bars (thambas) of the railings.[8] The fundamental difficulty in interpreting the site arises due to this early pillage. The site was initially excavated in the early 1940s.[9] But it would be nearly six decades before excavation activity resumed from 2001 to 2007 for four field seasons with an exemption of two field seasons in 2003–04 and 2005–06.[10] Further activity took place in field seasons 2010–11,[11] 2014–15[12] and 2018–19. Even now, the site is yet to be completely excavated on its northwest, west and central portions. From the very first excavation till the one conducted in 2014, no clear and systematic account has been reported except for a brief one in the *Interim Report* (2001–07). This report has no information on trench details, stratigraphic information of antiquities, measured drawing of structures etc. The preliminary report for the field season 2018–19 is yet to be published. Due to a gap of decades between one excavation and the next, and only partial attempts at conservation in between, the exposed structures degraded further. Continued discussion with staff who worked in these excavations and the corroboration of their inputs with the available reported evidence is the only way to interpret the site. Our reconstruction of the site is constrained by these limitations.

The 2008 *Interim Report* has three plans—one of Gajulabanda and two of Phanigiri (1950 and 2008).[13] A site plan of Phanigiri was published in *The Archaeological Bulletin*, No. 2. Issue 2 (authored by P. Sreenivasachar and published by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 1963) as figure 33. A comparative study of these plans gives us a history of excavation in the site from the 1940s (figures 4.4–4.6). Figure 4.4 covers the north-south axis exposing structures in the north, northwestern and eastern directions with traces of the 48-pillared congregation hall in Zone 3. Figure 4.5 gives us more comprehensive information about structures. Figure 4.6 leaves out the already excavated portions on the north and northeast and concentrates on the southern and eastern directions. It is clear that in the 1940s and '50s the excavations had not reached the bedrock level since the corridors of the viharas in Zone 1 are still not seen, except for the lime-plastered corridor of Zone 2. Therefore, the observation of Khaja Mahamad Ahmad—"the sculptures recovered from Phanigiri are less in number but intricate in nature"—is understandable as most of the fine pieces were recovered from the floor level.[14]

REVELATIONS ABOUT THE OVERALL SITE

Phanigiri represents a fantastic example of optimum usage of space. There are nearly 140 monastic cells traced in the complex. At its heyday, the complex would have covered the entire surface available on the hilltop along with extra territory gained by extended revetments. On the eastern side the walls of vihara cells are wider by 40–60 cm as compared to other viharas. This extra thickness provided



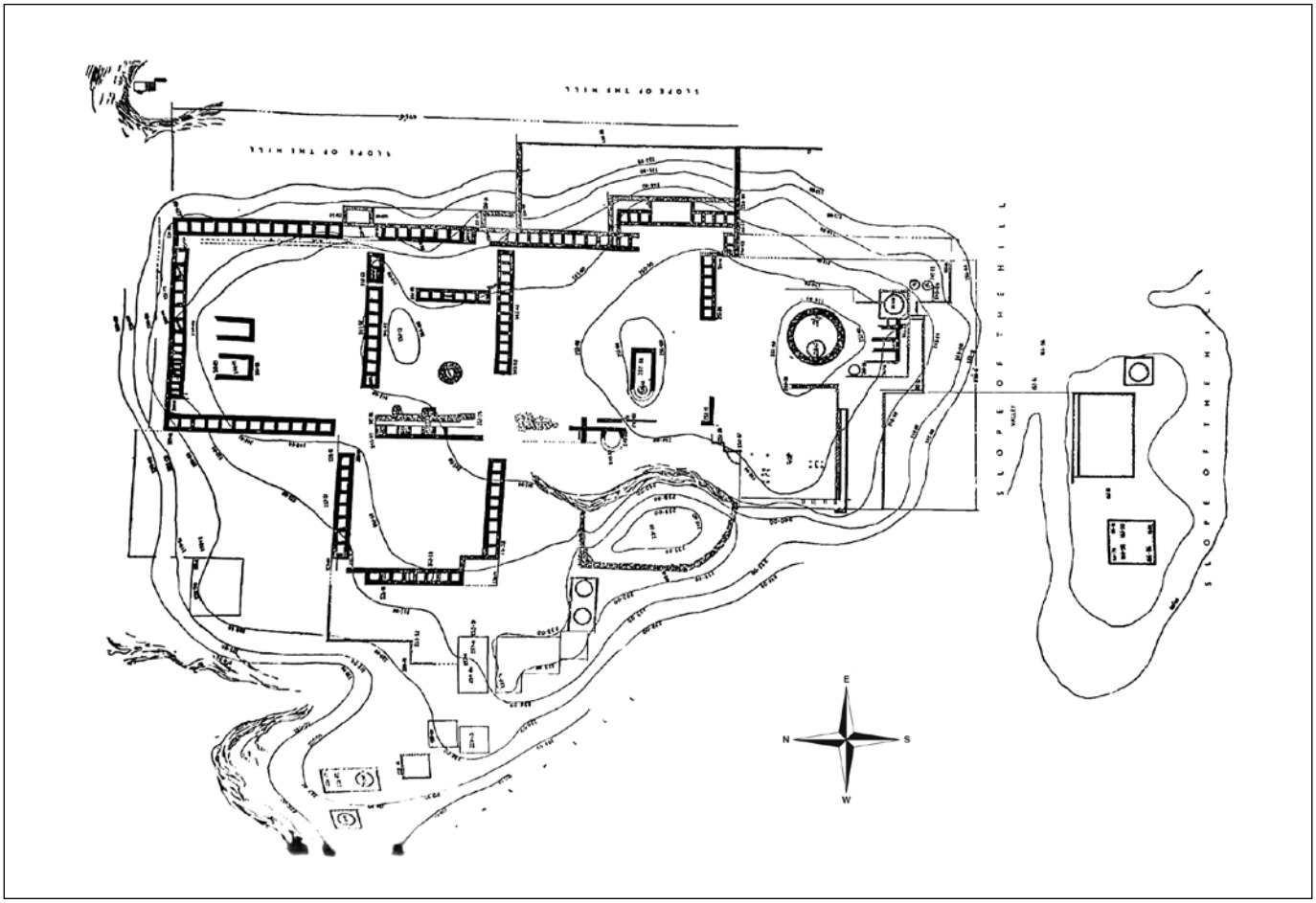
4.4 The 1950 site plan of the Phanigiri monastic complex. Source: Khaja Mahamad Ahmad, *Phanigiri Bhauddharama Shitilalu*, Hyderabad: Department of Aarsha, 1359.F (1950), pl. VI (original drawn in a scale of 1"=30').

4.5 The 1963 site plan which shows the stupa as the highest point and the southernmost slope as the lowest point in Phanigiri. This is the most detailed scale drawing of the site available till date. Source: *The Archaeological Bulletin*, No. 2, Issue 2 (1963) (original drawn in the scale of 1"=64').

4.6 The 2008 site plan of the Phanigiri monastic complex from the *Interim Report* based on excavations from 2001–07. Scale not available.

additional support. Besides having more than 25 cells on the eastern side which the residents could not have afforded to lose, the walls do not show much variation in size. However, boxed buttresses usually supported the higher and larger walls. Therefore, it is most likely that the report of 1950 mistook the cells on the eastern side for boxed buttresses. The brick revetment wall running along the length of the complex in the north-south direction had extended support from RRM revetments at lower levels. The surface of brick revetment was lime-plastered like other corridors in the complex; thus this area doubled up as the arterial north-south corridor. Given the topography of Phanigiri, these revetments were structural necessities. Careful planning converted them into utilitarian structures.

There are three breaks in the continuity of vihara cells on the eastern side which might have been added at a later date as they clearly have left behind discontinued walls as a trail (see figure 4.5). These openings might have provided access to viharas in Zones 1–3 from the eastern corridor. From a point which is parallel to the southeastern corner of the 48-pillared congregation hall in Zone 3 till the northernmost corner of the complex, remains of the base portion of limestone pillars placed in a straight line have been found. These pillars would have once supported the rafters which were used for the roofs of the vihara cells on the eastern side. This single stretch of viharas would have also provided the eastern facade an integrated look though internally the monastic complex was divided into at least three smaller units. On the western slope many rectangular/square bases of votive stupas are seen.


SLOPE OF THE HILL
E
N
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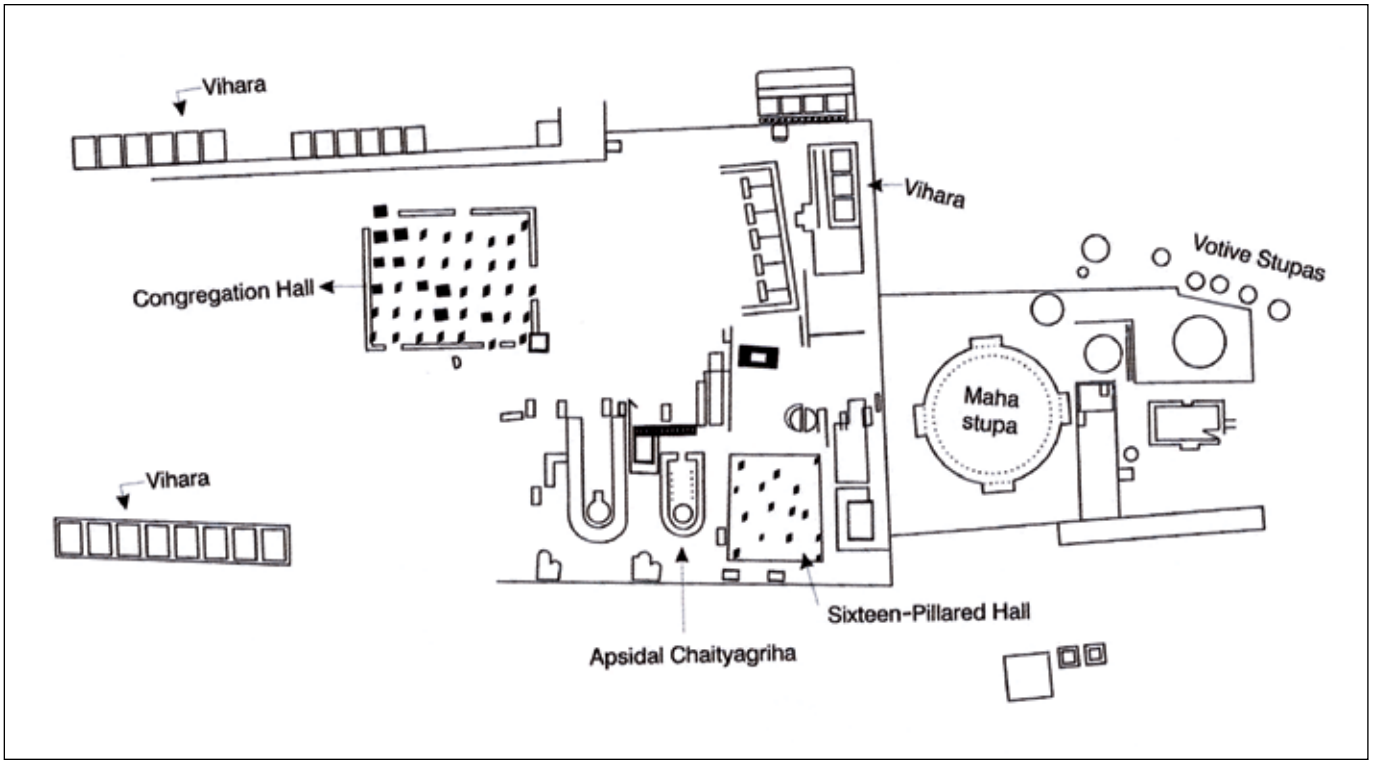
Vihara
Congregation Hall
Vihara
Votive Stupas
Maha stupa
Vihara
Sixteen-Pillared Hall
Apsidal Chaityagriha

The report of 1950 puts their count at 30 (see figure 4.5). We will now move on to a description of the site starting from the north direction: this is how it appears to a modern-day visitor approaching the mahastupa at Phanigiri (figures 4.7–4.10).

VIHARA ZONE 1

In the northernmost direction is the first monastic complex which has twin chaityas which are almost same in size (figure 4.11). Chaityas 3 and 4 face south, the direction of the mahastupa. The flights of steps from both the chaityas are aligned in an east-west direction with stairs on both directions and have rectangular or square landings on top and half-moon landings (chandrashila) at the bottom. Both the chaityas exhibit unity in construction material and stylistic components and their location as a pair in the middle of the northern vihara establishes symmetry and focus. The first documented usage of a double-chapel system is from Site 9 of Nagarjunakonda where twin chaityagrihas were built opposite each other.[15] Thus Phanigiri's apsidal chaityas (3 and 4) can be assigned to a period after the 3rd century AD when the twin-chapel system came into vogue. While the eastern chaitya has only the traces of a stupa, the western one has the traces of both a stupa and a pedestal. This allows us to speculate if one of them was a stupa chaitya and the other a Buddha chaitya. Elizabeth Rosen Stone mentions that the free-standing Buddha images which originated in the reign of Virapurushadatta came into greater prominence during Ehuvala Chamtamula's reign.[16] Can Phanigiri's free-standing Buddha images and Buddha chaitya be assigned to the same period?

Across from Chaityas 3 and 4 towards the south is a 24-pillared congregation hall at a lower level. The brick basements and their limestone cores which formed the base of the pillars were exposed in the field season 2018–19. This courtyard comprising two chaityas and a congregation hall is surrounded by 43 vihara cells in all four directions. Each row of vihara cells opens on to a corridor which is connected to the courtyard through steps with half-moon landings except the eastern one which is discussed in detail below. The eastern stretch is similar in style to the southernmost vihara as it is located almost at the bedrock level unlike the other sides where the viharas are located on an elevated level. The northern, western and southern vihara wings each have a set of three stairs (two flanking the corridor ends and one in the middle). The corridors and the stairs are covered in cuddapa stones. The stump of a single limestone pillar which would have supported the roof rafters is seen in the southern end of the western corridor. A large number of stucco figures and fragments were recovered from this row (figure 4.16). The remains of a votive stupa are found next to the corridor between the middle and southern staircases connecting the viharas with the courtyard. Two Roman gold coins were excavated from these cells during field season 2010–11 (figure 4.23). In this row, evidence of rebuilding is also seen in the eastern end (figure 4.27). This complex had its kitchen, storage area and refectory located in the northwestern corner where a large quantity of ash and broken pottery were found during excavation season 2018–19 (figure 4.28). This utility area is connected by a stone paved pathway to the north and western viharas and courtyard.

This complex has received maximum archaeological attention and in many places the bedrock is exposed. The plan of 1963 (see figure 4.5) gives us details of a top layer on the western side of the north vihara complex. As subsequent excavations have gone further in depth, this layer stands removed. The opening on the eastern side is indeed an entrance to this zone as affirmed by a stucco yaksha-dvarapala

that was excavated here (figure 4.18; cf. figure 3.30) along with stucco heads of Shankhanidhi and Padmanidhi, the accompanying yakshas associated with yaksha-dvarapalas (figures 4.19 and 4.20). The depiction of these yakshas is similar to the ones found in Cave 19 of Ajanta and in the Nagarjunakonda stupa site (figures 4.21 and 4.22).[17] It can therefore be inferred that the other two openings in the eastern vihara also served a similar purpose for their respective zones. This was definitely a later intervention when the monastic setup expanded and new access points were needed to cater to an increased number of habitants and visitors. Without this access, the western pathway would have been the only way to the mahastupa and to the southern pathway down the hill.

This complex is connected to the adjacent complex on the southwestern side through a staircase with nine stone steps and a lime-plastered parapet. The palmetto stucco finish at the bottom of the parapet is still intact. The flight of steps would have led pilgrims to the pathway which would have gone up to the mahastupa, passing through at least two other vihara complexes. This would have been the main circulation pathway on the western side with a north-south orientation. Beyond this pathway, towards the western edge of the hill, traces of more monastic cells are found. These may have been part of another unit.

VIHARA ZONE 2

Compared to Vihara Zone 1, this complex still has more area to be excavated. A circular structure was exposed during field season 2018–19. This may have been similar to the circular stupa chaityas discovered in other ancient Andhra Buddhist sites such as Thotlakonda and Pavuralakonda.[18] Traces of a stupa inside this chaitya haven't been found so far. It may have disintegrated, or there may have been a Buddha image installed (similar to the one reported at the Salihundam circular chaitya)[19] which was dislocated or decayed with time. Around this chaityagriha and the probable courtyard is a single row of vihara cells in the northern and western directions and two rows of vihara cells in the eastern direction[20] opening on to the courtyard. The circular chaitya opens to the west. However, the brick stupa seen in Zone 2 (see figure 4.5) is yet to be exposed. Currently a mound is seen in this location. The northern row of vihara cells is disconnected from the southern row of Zone 1 through an independent wall and 2.1 m spacing. This row has ten adjoined cells and two more cells in the eastern direction which are not connected to this row. Their separation might indicate they were cells meant for acharyas/Vinayadharas or used for some other eclectic purpose. Their higher elevation may be an indication of their higher stature. On the southwestern corner of this zone, traces of a structure with pillar-base-like granite slabs built on bedrock have been exposed recently. The complete structure and its nature may emerge through future excavations. The row of vihara cells adjacent to this structure (the row south of the circular chaitya) opens towards the south: it faces the 48-pillared congregation hall and is oriented towards Zone 3. In the southeastern direction of this complex is an RRM structure which goes down all the way to the modern boundary wall. It cuts across revetments, the lime-plastered corridor and the row of monastic cells, thus obstructing the north-south circulation on the eastern side. Its purpose is unclear; it may have been built to meet a need more pressing than the circulation plan of the complex or may have come up at a time when the corridor had ceased to be used. The vihara cells in the western side of Zone 2 have a completely plastered corridor and many stucco mouldings were recovered from here.

Following pages

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4.7–4.10 Aerial views of Zones 1–4 of the Phanigiri monastic complex.

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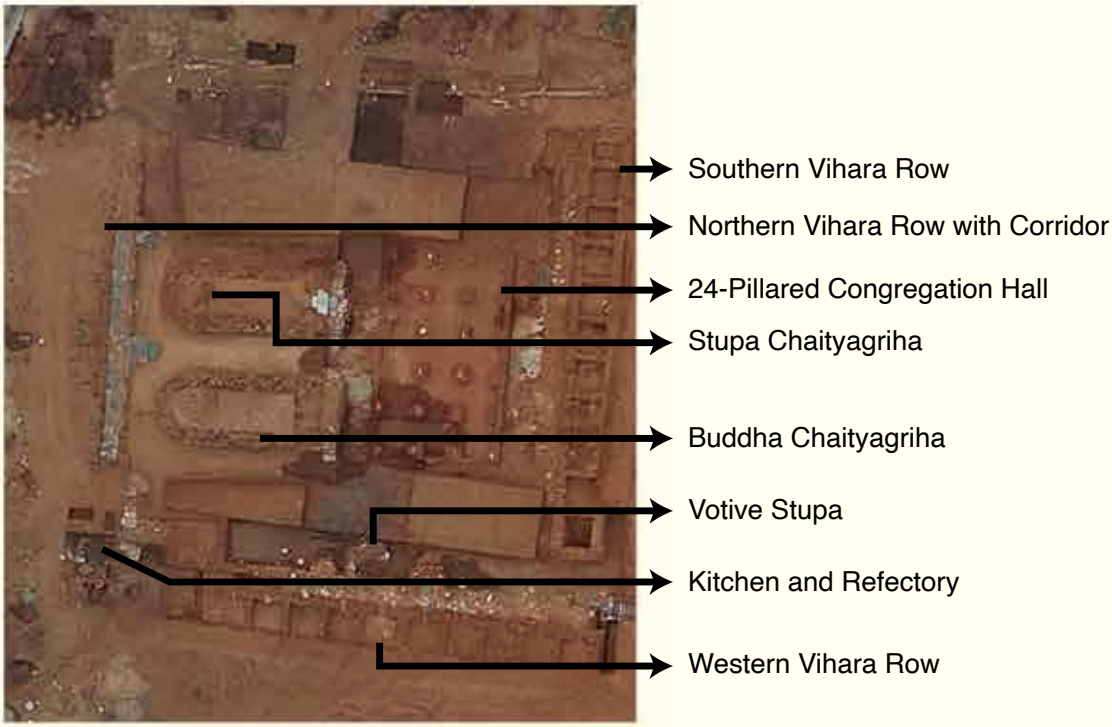
4.11 Scale drawing of Chaityas 3 and 4 in Zone 1 of Phanigiri.

Page 109
4.12 Aerial view of the octagonal stupa base found in Zone 3 of Phanigiri.

4.13 Plan from Nagarjunakonda Site 78 of a temple complex with two small octagonal structures that provide the closest comparison to the octagonal stupa base found in Zone 3 of Phanigiri. Source: Amita Ray, *Life and Art of Early Andhradesa*, New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1983, fig. 16.

4.14 and 4.15 Scale drawing of Chaityas 1 and 2 in Zone 3 of Phanigiri.

Zone 1



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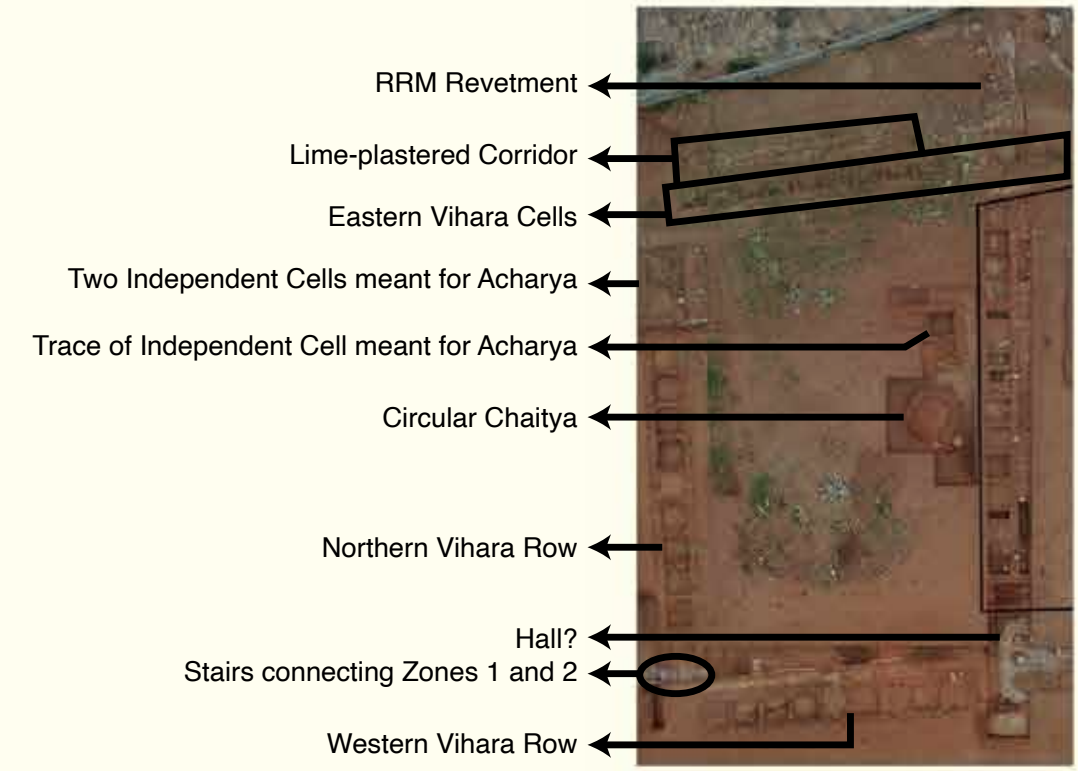
Zone 2



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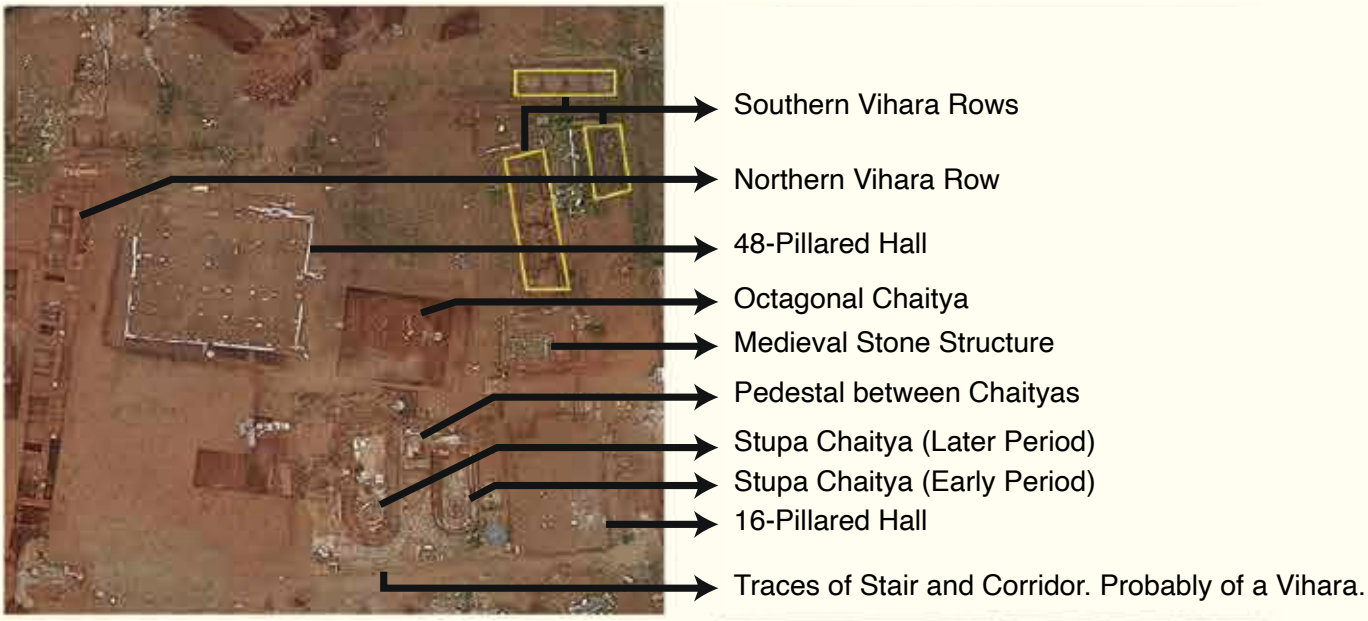
Zone 3



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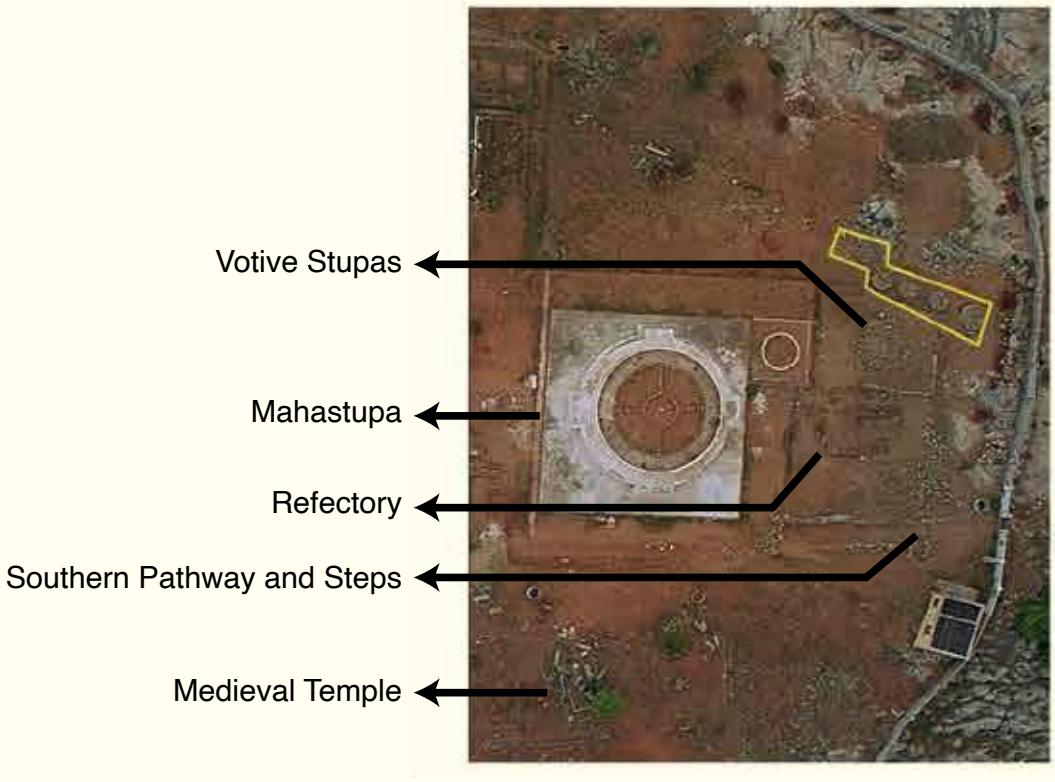
Zone 4



4.10

Zone 1

Zone 2

Zone 3

Zone 4

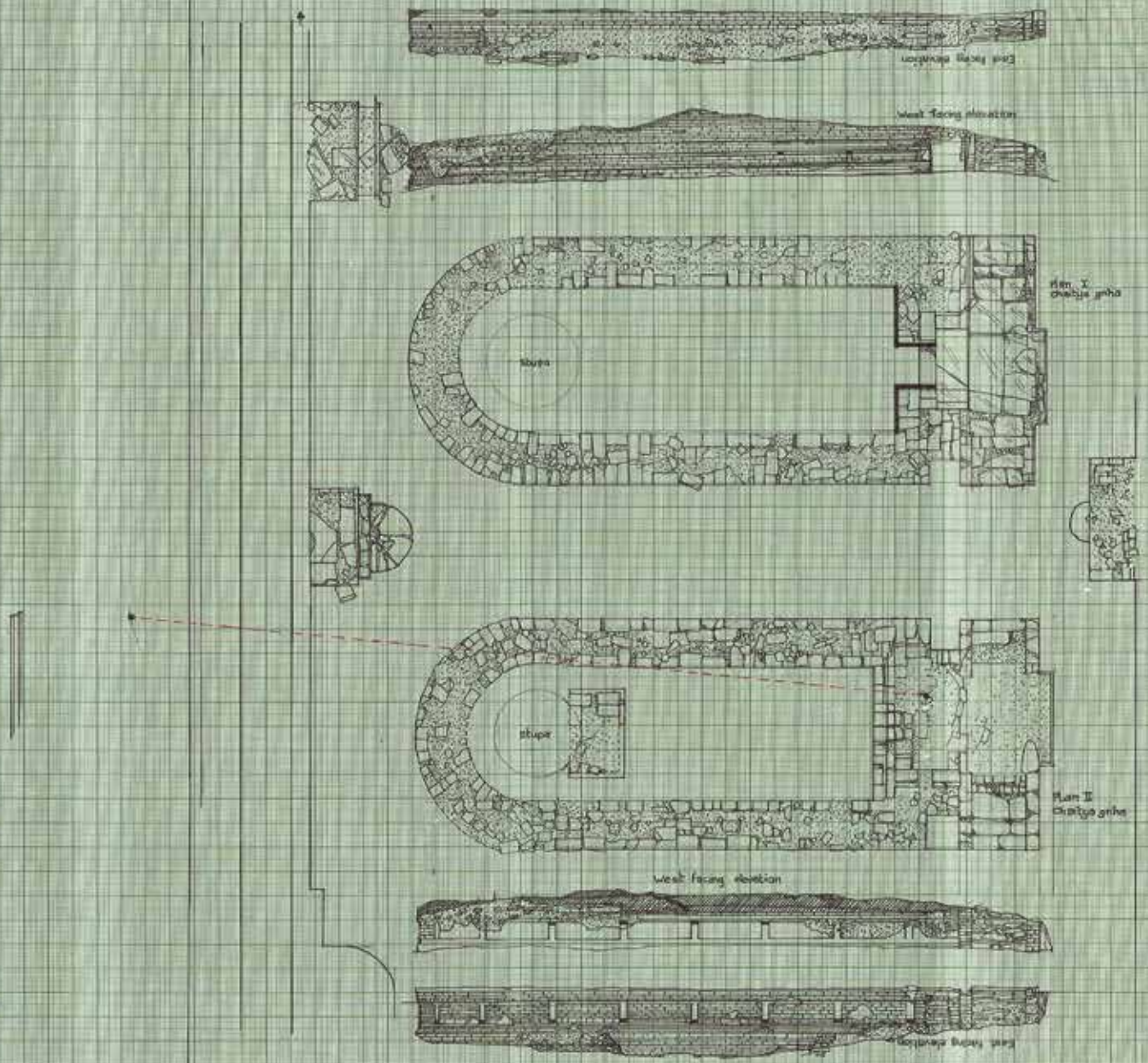
DEPARTMENT OF HERITAGE TELANGANA
Govt of Telangana Hyderabad

Site: Phanigiri
Complex:
Monument: Chaitya griha
Materials: Brick, Soile, Limestone
Date: 18/02/2018
Scale: 1 cm = 2 feet
Trench no.

Drawing by - Pranit V. Polekar.

0 10 20 30 Feet

N



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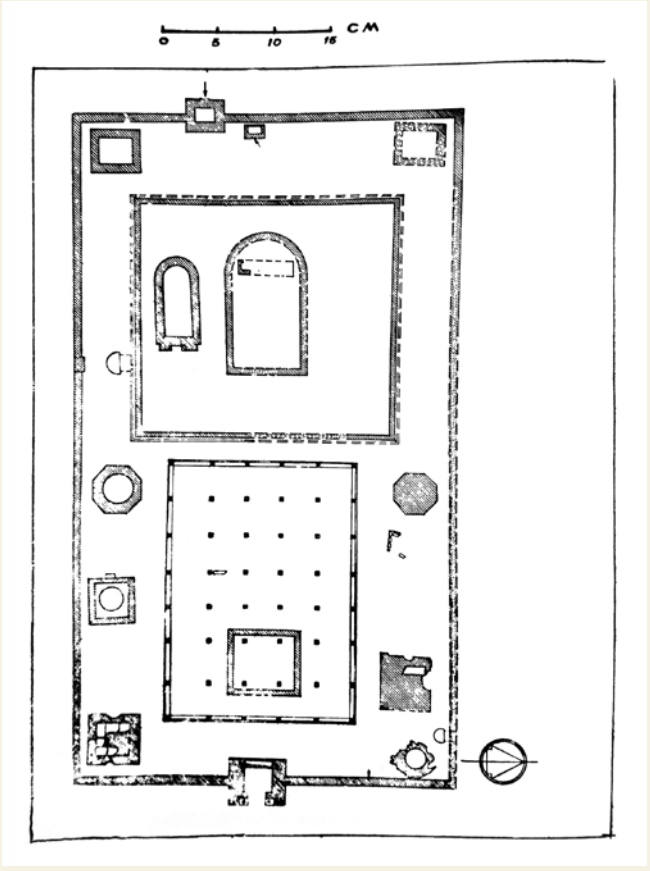
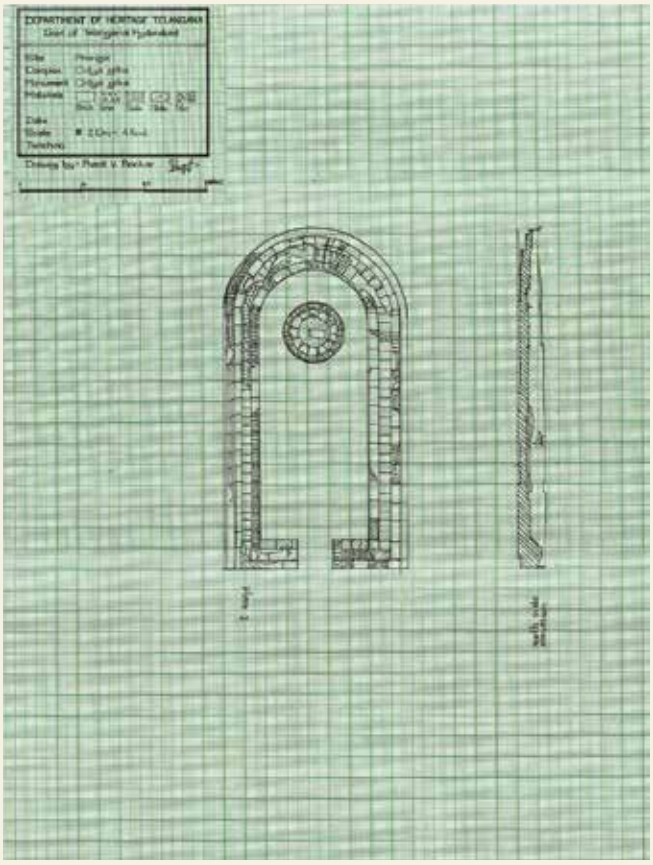
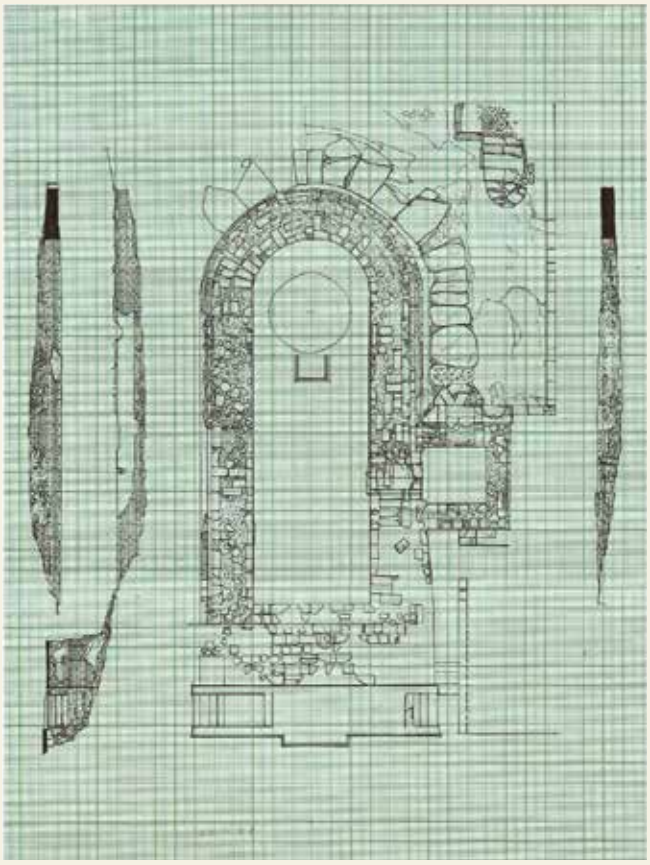


4.13



4.14



4.15

VIHARA ZONE 3

This is the locality from which a majority of the sculptures were recovered. A 48-limestone-pillared congregation hall stands on the northeast corner of the zone. The hall has two entrances, one each in the southern and western directions. The hall has an alignment of four smaller pillars as an inset to the four structural pillars forming the square at the southeastern corner of the hall. The purpose of having a four-pillared inset within the hall is not clear. This might have been an area earmarked for some special purpose. In the southwest external corner of this hall, there is a conjoined projection with a brick base, limestone core and sculpted panels that has its northern side aligned to the southwest exterior corner of the hall. The limestone core measures 43 x 14 cm which is the exact measurement of a stele depicting the turban of Buddha being carried to heaven that was recovered from the courtyard in Zone 3 (cf. figure 7.2). There is intricate sculpting on all three facades barring the back portion of the stele which indicates that it may have been placed against a backdrop. We can safely infer that it was part of a panel installed adjacent to the congregation hall and would have caught the attention of all those who set foot in the space. As Naman Ahuja discusses in the concluding chapter of this book, it would have reminded them of the sublime sacrifice of the Gracious One. The fact that so many sculpted pieces were recovered near the entrance of the congregation hall also indicates that this area was an important hub of activity. The hall would have had a tiled roof resting on wooden rafters which is evident from the row of limestone pillars on the southern side of the hall that support the rafters. Large quantities of tiles and nails of varied sizes and shapes excavated from this hall and elsewhere in the complex establish the extensive use of such roofing.[21]

Towards the southeast of this zone are two rows of north-facing vihara cells and a row of four cells facing west. The vihara cells in the southeastern corner are connected by a corridor and their interior walls have balustrades made of carved bricks resembling purnaghatas.[22] This row is abruptly intersected by a wall just after the third cell from the east. The entrance to this vihara suggests that the intervening wall was a later addition and divided the vihara approximately in half its length. This vihara is connected to the stupa through a separate staircase with a half-moon landing at the bottom and a rectangular landing at the top. Remains of limestone copings at the base of buildings are noticed in all three rows in the southeastern direction. During the field season 2018–19, a south-facing chaitya with an octagonal base was exposed to the south of the congregation hall (figure 4.12). This is unique as no stupa chaitya with an octagonal base has been reported from other sites in Andhradesha. Rockcut stupas on an octagonal platform found in the Bagh caves and in Gandhara may be outside the geographical context of Andhradesha, but go to show, as John Guy and Akira Shimada note in their chapters, how connected Phanigiri was with those regions. There is a chaitya vriksha panel with an octagonal railing from Sanchi but it does not really make for an exact comparison. The closest comparison with a similar structure, timeline and geographical context is from Site 78 of Nagarjunakonda where a large temple complex contains two octagonal structures (figure 4.13). H. Sarkar and B.N. Misra identify the Phanigiri structure as having Brahmanical affiliations and assign it to the mature plastic traditions of the Ikshvakus.[23] Amita Ray describes it as a Navagraha temple complex.[24] While we do not know the precise affiliation, what is clear is that Buddhism itself was transforming, and so too was its sacred architecture. The octagonal stupa chaitya in Phanigiri can be assigned to a phase between the late 3rd and early 4th century AD, thus

representing a transitional period when experiments beyond traditional apsidal and circular plans were taken up. The single brick course on the outer layers suggests that the wall was made of mud mortar or of lesser quality brick and the structure might not have been a fully covered chaityagriha. Traces of limestone slabs used for stupa panelling are clearly seen.

On an elevated level from this octagonal chaitya on the western direction are two other apsidal chaityas (1 and 2)[25] constructed parallel to each other (figures 4.14 and 4.15). Both the chaityas have separate stairs in a north-south alignment. The northern one is much bigger in size and portions of railings found around it show elaborate panelling with roundels depicting *Jataka* tales at the entrance. The southern Chaitya 1 is relatively smaller. Traces of post holes have been found on the floor of this chaitya. The size of these structures, type of material and their varied features prove that Chaityas 1 and 2 were constructed at different periods and must have preceded the twin-chapel system seen in Chaityas 3 and 4 in Zone 1. In the apse of Chaitya 2 on the pedestal in front of the stupa, a Buddhapada was found. Traces of a corridor with two stairs and half-moon landings suggest the existence of another row of viharas behind the two apsidal chaityas in the western direction (see figure 4.15). Another unique feature of the northern Chaitya 2 is that it had twin entrances. An adjoining cell-like entrance structure on the northern wall connected the chaitya from the northern direction. The half-moon landing on the west and opening in the northern wall make this amply clear. This might have been for residents coming from the western side of the monastic complex and those using the western circulation pathway (see figure 4.15). A comparable structure is reported from Alluru, Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, where one of the apsidal chaityas had an entrance in the northern side.[26] While in Alluru the context is not clear, in Phanigiri the utilitarian aspect is quite clear. A square structure with a pedestal-like platform is located between both the apsidal chaityas on the eastern edge. This might have had a Buddha installed on top of it when image worship became acceptable and thus was a later addition. In front of this pedestal, three more Buddhapada panels were found on the eastern slope of the intervening space between Chaityas 1 and 2. They were placed facing east (cf. figures 2.6 and 2.9). Their placement adheres to the tradition of placing them in proximity to a stupa or a temple as they are considered objects of veneration in their own right.[27] Out of three Buddhapadas originally installed, only one is seen in situ currently. Images of a bodhisatva or royal figure and Buddha were recovered close to these Buddhapadas. The cult figures recovered from this zone can be put in context with others in Andhradesha. One of the Buddhapada inscriptions is assigned to the 4th century AD.[28] We can infer that the free-standing Buddha was added as one of the later cult figures when the laity became more influential. However, the sangha did not find it necessary to remove any of the pre-existing cult figures from the scene of worship.

Most of Phanigiri's embellished panels were also found in this zone (cf. figure 6.2). The significant ones are in the architraves of a free-standing torana, the only one to come from any Buddhist site south of Sanchi.[29] Parul Pandya Dhar's chapter in this book provides a detailed analysis of the torana. The components of a free-standing pillar recovered from this zone and a rider on a mythical animal (figures 4.39, 4.40 and 4.42) show us the standardized plastic traditions that were practised in Phanigiri. Do these sculptural pieces lead us anywhere in understanding who were the residents of this site? In Nagarjunakonda, of all the orthodox Buddhists sects, only monasteries of the Aparasailas (Sites 2, 3, 4 and 9) have yielded handsome

sculptures which may indicate a shift to more liberal and popular views.[30] Do these sculptures indicate the presence of Aparasailas in Phanigiri? Perhaps the Buddhist establishment here was so highly revered and popular that such ornate sculpting was deemed fit and had gained financial support and patronage from the royals and the laity.

4.17 A toe ring recovered from one of the viharas in Phanigiri.

STUPA ZONE 4

In Andhradesha, the earliest representations of the Buddha were in the form of images such as the wheel, the bodhi tree and the throne. These aniconic images were incorporated in stupas where a wheel-shaped base represented the dharmachakra-pravartana, the harmika base the bodhi vriksha and the chattri, the enlightenment. This kind of symbolism built up over time and eventually led to the stupa representing the Buddha himself. The mahastupa or mahachaitya in Phanigiri is located on the southern edge of the site. It is built on a brick platform measuring 30 x 30 m with a diameter of 23.2 m including the ayaka vedika. The purpose of building stupas on square platforms is not clear. But we find another stupa built on the bedrock at Gajulabanda, hardly 4 km away from Phanigiri. Both are in a similar setting and have survived the vagaries of time.[31] However, the clear advantage of gaining more surface by reclaiming the slopes cannot be ignored. An inscription on the broken piece of a chattri indicates that the Phanigiri mahastupa commemorates Kanamulaya, a great acharya of Buddhism. The palaeographic dating of the inscription in the chattri suggests that it was installed between the 1st and 2nd century AD.[32] This stupa in its earlier phase was a simple circular structure with a hub and four spokes.[33] Yet, the structural features suggest that it was extended at a later date in typical Andhra style[34] which included the addition of a wheel-shaped base, an ayaka platform[35] with ayaka khambas and/or pillars.[36] This probably happened during the Ikshvaku period in the reign of Sri Chamtamula and Virapurushadatta (3rd century AD) when many of the extensions in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda were also made. A.H. Longhurst noted that ayaka khambas were only found in the larger and more important stupas.[37] Ayaka platforms devoid of ayaka khambas at the nearby Gajulabanda stupa reiterate this point. At the time of clearing the site for conservation in 2015, out of 20 ayaka khambas, bases of only three and five khambas were exposed on the northern and western ayaka vedikas, respectively. Currently only two are seen on the northern ayaka vedika and three on the western one (figures 4.31 and 4.32). One of the ayaka khambas on the western side has an inscription which records the gift of an ayaka khamba to a "bhagavatu mahapuglasa" (the best of beings). It is pertinent to note that the same invocation is used in one of the inscriptions in Nagarjunakonda,[38] thus indicating a general practice. This has been studied by scholars of religious history. But as Peter Skilling mentions in this book, they have not been able to conclusively determine if the inscriptions indicate the doctrinal orientation of the donors.

While undertaking scientific clearance for the restoration work at the stupa, a dull red casket containing a mud pot was recovered from the northeastern part of its medhi on January 6, 2015 (figures 4.33 and 4.34). The pot further contained a silver reliquary with 11 miniature beads, three silver and three gold flower petals (cf. figure 3.1). The well of the stupa had already been ransacked by treasure-hunters as observed by the conservation staff.[39] Again, we see that Longhurst's observations while excavating Nagarjunakonda can also be applied to Phanigiri. While reliquaries

4.16 Stucco objects recovered from the western row of vihara cells in Zone 1 of Phanigiri.

4.18 The eastern row of viharas in Zone 1 of Phanigiri from where a stucco yaksha-dvarapala was recovered.

4.19 and 4.20 Stucco heads of two yakshas—Padmanidhi (capped with a padma or lotus) and Shankhanidhi (capped with a shankha or conch)—that were discovered in the eastern row of viharas in Zone 1 of Phanigiri. Their discovery alongside the yaksha-dvarapala confirms that the latter was indeed a dvarapala.

4.21 and 4.22 Other examples of the pot-bellied Padmanidhi and Shankhanidhi, carved in stone, found at Nagarjunakonda. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

It can be argued that stucco work in early Deccan sites like Phanigiri was as prolific as it was in contemporaneous Taxila and other Gandharan sites. Stucco images have been found at many places near Phanigiri, including Dhulikatta and Koti Lingala (dating to the Early Historic Phase), and Gollathagudi in the Mahbubnagar district (created after 8th century AD). In all these complexes, stucco was used to decorate most of the walls of the monasteries and not just those of the main stupas. It is likely that the stucco of this region is whitish, not because of a kaolin cover but because of crushed limestone or soaking the limestone chalk in water. This resulted in the stone carvings having a dazzling jewel-like effect at spaces where they would be most visible—an entrance, the columns of a congregation hall, a wall here, a vedika there. For more information on this, see K.M. Varma, *Amaravati and the Beginnings of Stucco Modelling in India*, Santiniketan: Proddu, 1985.

4.23 Roman gold coins issued by Nerva and Faustina II that have been found in Zone 1 of Phanigiri.

are typically placed at the centres of stupas, those at Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati and Phanigiri were found away from the centre and were thus saved.[40]

The mahastupa at Phanigiri would have been a common place of worship[41] while individual monasteries had their own chaityas. A large number of stucco figurines and mouldings recovered around the mahastupa indicate that the hemispherical dome, or anda, was highly decorated with stucco work. Though the remains of casing slabs can be seen at the bottom around the medhi, only a single partially broken panel has survived. It has images of a stupa protected by nagas and two worshippers on it (cf. figure 5.6), similar to drum slab reliefs found at Amaravati depicting the Ramagrama stupa. No ayaka pillars are carved on this panel despite the stupa having them. One tends to agree with Elizabeth Rosen Stone, Philippe Stern and Mirelle

4.24 and 4.25 Views of Chaityas 1 and 2 soon after the excavations in Zone 3 of Phanigiri. Source: B. Subrahmanyam, J. Vijaya Kumar, G.V. Ramakrishna Rao and K.S.B. Kesava, *Phanigiri: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh, An Interim Report, 2001–07*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2008.

Bénisti that the naga figures seen in the Amaravati panel are later additions since they are absent from the drum slab at Phanigiri. It may also be noted that early forms of stupas were depicted on panels irrespective of the actual components and developments of the structure to which these panels belonged. However, once the ayaka pillars were added (this wasn't the case in all stupas), most of the sculptural embellishment was done on their platforms. Unfortunately, only one such ornate panel (figure 4.41) survives in Phanigiri. The square platform of the mahastupa was extended by a random rubble masonry (RRM) platform on which a votive stupa was added in the southeast corner at a later date. The eastern side of the stupa has at least six more rubble-packed votive stupas and one brick votive stupa placed in a north-south alignment. Towards the western side of the stupa, pillar remains of a medieval temple and panavattam (the female base of a shiva linga) made of recycled limestone have been found (figure 4.29). From the southwestern corner of the brick platform of the mahastupa, a pathway extends towards the south. At the end of this pathway are three steps taking one to the bedrock level. Towards the eastern side of this pathway, there is a rectangular brick structure. Large quantities of ash, pot sherds and conical bowls were noticed here and it is presumed that the building may have been a refectory.[42] Thus, we know that at least two kitchens and refectories were possibly located in the Phanigiri complex. Towards the south is the exit through the modern boundary wall. This exit route and its environs have already been discussed above in the section on the approach to the site. Further down is the Vaishnavite dvikutalayam of the Kakatiya period. Phanigiri village is located further south of the hill. However, there are remains of early settlements as well, and a cairn circle in the vicinity of the village serves as an indicator of continued habitation in the area since the Megalithic period (cf. figure 1.2).

THE TANKS OF PHANIGIRI

Tanks were an important lifeline for monasteries and their construction by donors has been recorded in inscriptions found in sites like Nagarjunakonda.[43] Although Phanigiri has yielded no such direct inscriptional evidence, it is clear that the monastic community here paid attention to the storage and conservation of water. This is evident from two water cisterns built in the western and northwestern directions which used the natural slope of the bedrock to collect the run-off and store water. Besides these, a number of stone pieces have been found which were possibly used as water channels to harvest water (figure 4.30). On the northern side, outside the boundary wall is Seethamma Bhavi (Mother Sita's Well), a natural spring. At the foot of the hill, in the northeast and southern directions are a pond and a koneru (tank with steps) probably endowed to the dvikuta vaishnavalayam and a late medieval vaishnavalayam, respectively. A vast lake is located at a distance from the hill in the northeastern direction. The availability of easy water supply from these bodies would have made agriculture sustainable.

ECONOMY OF BELIEF

Dakshinapatha (an ancient trade route connecting central and south India and a generic term used to indicate that part of the subcontinent which lies to the south of the Vindhya range) was known for its shells, diamonds and mineral resources from the days of the *Arthashastra*.[44] Of the five great routes that converged in Vengi (see figure 4.2),[45] Phanigiri was located in the one that connected Masolia (Machilipatnam) on the east coast with Surparaka of Aparanta (Sopara) on the west coast via Calliena (Kalyan) and Tagara (Ter).[46] Masolia was part of a network of ports on the east coast which linked the entire Bay of Bengal, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. On the western coast, Tagara was part of the sea-based trade network that connected major ports such as Barygaza and Barbarike to Mediterranean trade. These ports were entry and exit points to a network of inland trade routes traversed by merchants from pre-Mauryan times. For nearly four centuries, much of the Dakshinapatha was under the rule of the Satavahanas who secured a long spell of peace and sustained economic activity for this land. They gave great importance to agricultural activity, especially to the reclamation of new lands for cultivation and the ploughing of wastelands.[47] Systematic land administration was put in place by them in the western parts of their empire which in the 1st century AD would have reached the lower Krishna valley. This gave rise to a powerful agricultural peasantry which owned large tracts of land and controlled large groups of farm labourers. Along with them, traders and craftsmen's guilds became influential. These groups among the laity became the major sources of support for Buddhist establishments (inscriptional evidence points in particular to the Gahapati, Kamara and Setti classes). In Phanigiri, the inscription noting the donation of Budhannika mentions her as the wife of the notable gahapati Tummaka (cf. figure 1.21).[48] Similar inscriptional evidence is reported from Nagarjunakonda and other sites. A toe ring recovered from one of the viharas in Phanigiri also highlights this close relation between the laity and monastery (figure 4.17).

Additionally, during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, overseas trade with Rome flourished to the great advantage of India. Excavations in Phanigiri have yielded two Roman gold coins, one Roman silver coin, two silver Western Kshatrapa coins, 40 Mahatalavara coins belonging to Mahakuta Mahatalavara and Mahatalavara Vajasa and several Satavahana and Ikshvaku coins (figure 4.26). The ship type coins of Sri Yajna Satakarni known from the Guntur hoard and the mention of “mahanavika” in the inscriptions of Guntupalli and Ghantasala underline the prominence of sea trade in the region. The spillover benefit was a vibrant inland trade through which the Roman coins reached places as far away as Veepagantla and Akenpalle in interior Telangana. Rebecca Darley infers that the Roman and Byzantine coins were considered as high-value portable objects and associated with fertile areas and elite settlements.[49] Thus the Roman coins found in Phanigiri establish the elite nature of this monastery and the neighbouring complexes in the Krishna valley. She also asserts that those coins reached India “fairly close to their date of minting and hoard depositions were probably made within a century of their arrival”. Of the three Roman coins found in Phanigiri, two gold coins were issued by Nerva and Faustina II (see figure 4.23) and a highly abraded silver coin by Augustus. It is pertinent to note that Emperor Nerva ruled the Roman Empire for just 15 months from 96 AD September to 98 AD January. So, this coin exemplifies the high rate of circulation of Roman coins in India. Both the gold coins are pierced from the obverse for use as pendants. This further establishes their status as high-value objects. The Western Kshatrapa coin and silver punch-marked coin are also considered high-value objects but cannot be

4.26 Obverse (left column) and reverse (right column) sides of coins found at Phanigiri, belonging to the Mahatalavaras (top row), Ikshvakus (second row), Satavahanas (third row) and Western Kshatrapas (bottom row).

4.27 Scale placed on a wall at a lower level in the vihara facing the chaityas in Zone 1 of Phanigiri. Subsequent construction has added more partition walls of lesser thickness as seen in the upper half of the image.

4.28 Remains of storage jars, broken pottery, ash and dishes found in an area of Zone 1 of Phanigiri that was possibly a kitchen and refectory.

4.29 Panavattam, or the female base of a shiva linga, found in a brick enclosure towards the western side of the mahastupa at Phanigiri.

4.30 One of the many stone ducts found at Phanigiri that may have been used for water harvesting.

used to date the site. However, the Satavahana, Ikshvaku and Mahatalavara coins can be used for the latter purpose: they date the Buddhist establishment from the 1st century BC to the 4th century AD.

These systems of monetary flow eventually made the offerings and image worship of Buddha widely acceptable even for the most orthodox of Buddhist sects. This points to a contradiction between the texts and practices. Vasumitra mentions that the Saila schools continued to disapprove of offerings made to a chaitya and considered them of not great merit.[50] However, this seems to be applicable only to a certain section of the Mahasanghikas. From making offerings to a stupa, eventually offering a stupa itself came to be seen as a sign of merit. The Chaityakas (Purvasailas) might have started the practice, but it was eventually adapted by even the Theravadins.[51] In Phanigiri a number of votive stupas were constructed towards the western and southern directions of the mahastupa.

The coins of the Satavahanas continued to be in circulation under the Ikshvakus who ruled for a century afterwards. To cash in on the popularity of their predecessors, they continued the Satavahana usage of matronymics and also the elephant and Ujjain symbols popular in the lower Krishna valley. However, they could never

4.31 and 4.32 Remains of the ayaka platforms and khambas surrounding the mahastupa in Zone 4 of Phanigiri, seen soon after their exposure and seen now.

match the mint quality of the Satavahanas. Viewing it from a different perspective, the complete absence of coins among subsequent ruling dynasties who followed the Ikshvakus such as the Vishnukundins and Shalankayanas clearly establishes the decline and end of activities at the Buddhist monastery in Phanigiri.[52]

THE DECLINE OF THE SITE

The signs of trouble brewing can be felt in one of the last inscriptions found in Phanigiri. Datable to 300–350 AD, this inscription gains significance as it asserts the supremacy of the dharmachakra over the chakra of the one who assassinated Madhu (Vishnu) and the holder of the bull banner (Shiva).[53] This must be juxtaposed with the appearance of the earliest Brahmanical temples in south India at Nagarjunakonda towards the end of the 3rd century AD with the installation of the Ashtabhujaswamin temple in 278 AD.[54] Though both the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus were followers of Hinduism, there is enormous epigraphical evidence of their royal patronage to Buddhist establishments. Towards the 4th century, this patronage assumed shades of subjugation when a chaya stambha (memorial pillar) was erected to honour King Rudrapurushadatta's mother in front of a chaityagriha at Site 24 in Nagarjunakonda.

Higher dependency on royal patronage might have eventually led to an aggressive competition with other upcoming interests, such as those of the Shaivites and Vaishnavites. This inscription is an echo of such a clash.

Externally, other factors too came into play around the same time. The sea trade with Rome declined drastically, evident from the fewer Roman coins found after the 3rd century AD.[55] The trickledown effect of this was the downturn in support extended to the monasteries by the laity and royalty. Around the same time, we witness another development in the political scene of the Krishna valley. An inscription found in Palnad, Guntur district, issued by Simhavarman establishes the growing power of the Pallavas in the Krishna valley. Within 50 years we come across another charter issued by Sivaskandavarman from Kanchi, ordering the governor of Dhanyakataka (the main ancient city near Amaravati) about the donation of a village.[56] Thus the nodal centre of southern Buddhism passed on to the hands of the Pallavas who might have become the chief benefactors of Phanigiri while the Ikshvakus of Vijayapuri stood supplanted or subdued by the 4th century. Internally, the Buddhist church also showed signs of shifts from its lofty standards. K.R. Subramanian identifies the introduction of gods and goddesses similar to Hindu deities and from Vajrayana Tantrism as accelerating internal degeneration.[57] The decline in patronage, change in political dispensation coupled with internal conflict among the religious community accelerated the downfall of Buddhism in the Krishna valley of which Phanigiri bore the collateral damage.

The end of Phanigiri was brutal. The site was vandalized and completely desecrated. The evidence is the large-scale dumping of broken sculptures in front of Chaityas 1 and 2 (cf. figure 6.2). A careful examination of the image of a so-called bodhisatva which is broken just below the knee reveals the impact of a heavy object breaking away a portion of the left lower limb. The broken sculpture was kept with its back to the wall in an upright position and the detached limbs were carefully arranged in front of it (figures 4.35 and 4.36; cf. figure 3.18). Almost all the heavy sculptures can be seen arranged against a supporting structure to avoid further tilting and damage. This was clearly an attempt to salvage what was remaining. We don't know who made this attempt and when.

4.33 and 4.34 The dull redware casket excavated from the northeastern part of the medhi of the mahastupa at Phanigiri. Inside the casket, a mud pot was found, containing a silver reliquary with beads and gold and silver flowers.

4.35 and 4.36 The in-situ position of a royal figure/bodhisatva/ yaksha discovered during the 2004 excavations in Zone 3 of Phanigiri. The figure's limbs were kept in front with the main upper body propped against a panel. It was left in a standing position which shows that some care was taken to pay it respect and ensure it survives.

4.37 The base of the central mandapa and the sanctum sanctorum of the Kakatiyan temple in the southern side of Phanigiri hill. The temple reused bricks from the Buddhist monastic complex. It was ransacked by treasure-hunters in between, which caused extensive damage to the structure.

4.38 Bricks seen on the vimana of the Kakatiyan temple. Their measurements are the same as the bricks found in the Buddhist complex, indicating a reuse of older material.

4.39 Rider on a mythical bull-like animal, found among other sculptural fragments in Zone 3 of Phanigiri. Source: B. Subrahmanyam et al., *An Interim Report*.

4.40 Rider on a mythical goat or ram from the Amareswara Swamy temple, Amaravati. Source: P. Sitapati and V.V. Krishna Sastry, *New Satavahana Sculptures*, Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1980, pl. 14. The comparison of figure 4.39 with this image points to the standardized plastic traditions of the region that came to be embodied in Phanigiri.

Similarly, we do not know who led the attack at this site and why. However, we do know that the decline of Buddhism and the revival of Hinduism occurred almost concurrently in Andhradesha. This resulted in the usurpation of Buddhist centres by Brahmanical and Jain groups. Phanigiri hill was turned into a Shaivite centre as mentioned in the discussion of Zones 3 and 4. By the medieval period, the site became a source of construction material for the neighbouring village and its religious establishments. The vimanas of the Kakatiyan Vaishnavite temple on the south of the hill and the Shiva temple in Phanigiri village stand testimony to this; here bricks from the Phanigiri monastic complex are used (figures 4.37 and 4.38). A slab bearing an image of Garuda with a serpent in his clutches tells the ironical story of Phanigiri, depicting how the nagas that once protected the stupa were later vanquished by the mythical bird.

Many early Buddhist sites across the Krishna valley such as Bhattiprolu, Gudivada and Ghantasala are identified by the local communities as "the mounds of the harlots".[58] B. Subrahmanyam may be referring to this when he says, "The creed of pure morality came to be lodged in brothels miscalled monasteries." Was this the justification offered when large-scale destruction of these monasteries took place? Was this the reason why the sites were discredited in public memory and history? Or was it their degeneration which led to disrepute and eventual destruction? Place names can be revelations by themselves. Sometimes they reveal less and keep us pondering.

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FIGURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All images unless otherwise credited are courtesy the Department of Heritage Telangana.

4.41 Fragments of an ornate panel that once decorated the platform supporting the ayaka pillars near the mahastupa at Phanigiri.

ENDNOTES

1 Phaniprasad, Phanikumar, Phaneendra etc. are common names in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. In daily usage Phanigiri has been corrupted into Panikara.

2 *Geology and Mineral Resources of Telangana*, compiled by K.M. Reddy and R.M. Sundaram, Kolkata: Geological Survey of India, 2015.

3 *Buddha's Teachings. Being the Sutta Nipāta or Discourse-Collection*, edited by Lord Chalmers, Harvard Oriental Series, London: Humphrey Milford, Harvard University Press and Oxford University Press, 1932, Book 5, p. 235, Verse 977.

4 Ibid., p. 238, Verses 1011–13.

5 *Annual Report of the Department of Archaeology*, *1982–83*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1983, p. 19.

6 Nalinaksha Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, p. 64.

7 *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 20 (1929–30), edited by Hirananda Sastry, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1933, p. 4; Queen Rudradharabhatarika was married to Madariputra Virapurushadatta belonging to the house of Chashtana of the Western Kshatrapas whose capital was Ujjain.

8 *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department (H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominion)*, Hyderabad: Government Central Press, 1942, p. 2.

9 B. Subrahmanyam, J. Vijaya Kumar, G.V. Ramakrishna Rao and K.S.B. Kesava, *Phanigiri: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh, An Interim Report, 2001–07*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2008, p. 5. This mentions that the site was excavated from 1941–44. In the accession register of the State Museum of Telangana, Hyderabad, coins from Phanigiri are listed only for the year 1352 F (1942 AD) i.e. under Accession No. 19/1352F.

10 Ibid., p. 6.

11 Information gathered from the Accession Register of State Museum, Hyderabad, Telangana under Accession Nos. 16836 and 16837. No report for this field season was published.

12 Unpublished report of Department of Heritage Telangana.

13 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, p. 14.

14 Khaja Mahamad Ahmad,

Phanigiri Bhauddharama Shitilalu, Hyderabad: Department of Aarsha, 1359.F (1950), p. 2.

15 Elizabeth Rosen Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994, p. 20.

16 Ibid., p. 17.

17 Geri H. Malandra, *Unfolding a Mandala: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Ellora*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 105.

18 *Andhra Pradesh Archaeology: A Review, 1987–2001*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2002, pp. 25, 69.

19 Jithendra Das, *The Buddhist Architecture in Andhra*, New Delhi: Books & Books, 1994, p. 128.

20 The easternmost vihara is a continuous structure coming from Zone 1 and continues into Zone 3. The six-celled structure with a corridor which is further west of the easternmost row is inferred from figure 4.4. During field season 2018–19, one cell was fully exposed and another partially for the second time; earlier, debris had completely covered these structures, thus reducing the height of these cells. As the current excavation has gone down much lower than the levels mentioned in the 1963 plan, the adjoining corridor has also been exposed. Both these evidences have allowed us to assume a structure for this. The stairs are yet to be exposed. The reduction in the height of the structure also underlines the looming threat to the exposed structures if immediate conservation is not taken up.

21 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, p. 29.

22 Ibid., p. 9.

23 H. Sarkar and B.N. Misra, *Nagarjunakonda*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2006, pp. 27–28.

24 Amita Ray, *Life and Art of Early Andhradesa*, New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1983, p. 191 and fig. 19.

25 After the numbers given in the *Interim Report*, pp. 7–8.

26 *Indian Archaeology 2007–08—A Review*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, p. 4 and fig. 2.

27 Anna Maria Quagliotti, *Buddhapadas*, Kamakura: Institute of Silk Road Studies, 1998, p. 121.

28 *Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa* (EIAD) 109. This online corpus, mainly compiled and edited by Stefan Baums, Arlo Griffiths, Ingo Strauch and Vincent Tournier, is a publication of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (Paris, France), realized in collaboration with

4.42 On the right margin of the facing page are components of a free-standing pillar recovered from Zone 3 of Phanigiri. Above, we see the veneration of a pillar in a fragment from the ASI Museum, Nagarjunakonda, which gives us a sense of what the complete Phanigiri pillar may have looked like. Figure above courtesy Director General ASI.

the HiSoMA Research Centre (Lyon, France) and hosted by TGIR Huma-Num (France), http://hisoma.huma-num.fr/exist/apps/EIAD/index2.html.

29 Parul Pandya Dhar, "Piecing a Puzzle: A Unique Toraṇa from Phanigiri, Telangana", *Proceedings of the Second International Seminar, "Telangana through Ages: Perspectives from Ancient and Medieval Periods", January 18–19, 2018*, edited by Shrikant Ganvir, Hemant Dalavi and Harshada Wirkud, Hyderabad: Department of Heritage Telangana, 2019, p. 53.

30 Das, *The Buddhist Architecture in Andhra*, p. 69.

31 Ibid., "They might have served as protection to the base of the *stūpa* from rain or flood".

32 EIAD 112.

33 There is no photographic evidence available which can clearly indicate that it was a four-spoked stupa. Nor is this point mentioned in the *Interim Report*. This stupa was not cleared for conservation as part of the excavation activity. In the absence of a conservation and excavation report, it is even more difficult to conclude if this was a solid brick stupa or a stupa with four spokes. However, Shri Narsingh, Conservation Assistant, and Shri B. Narayana, Assistant Engineering Director, suggested that the stupa at Phanigiri may have initially been such. In the Krishna valley, the wheel plan had a hub and more commonly four, six, eight or ten spokes. They symbolically represent the four Vaishavidyas (four noble truths), shat paramitas (six perfections), ashtangamarga (eight-fold path) and dashavalas (ten values), respectively. We see this style spreading beyond the valley to sites such as Nelakondapalli, Dhulikatta and Phanigiri. However, the stupa at Kondapur was circular, thus indicating the co-existence of both styles in that period.

34 The most important features of this style include stupas based on a wheel plan and ayaka vedikas (platforms) in four cardinal directions. In case of important stupas, these platforms had five ayaka khambas (free-standing columns with square bases and octagonal shafts).

35 Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu Periods*, Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons, 1959, p. 37; A.H. Longhurst, "The Great Stupa at Nagarjunakonda in Southern India", *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. LXI (1932), p. 188. While Brown uses the term "āryaka", meaning worshipful, Longhurst uses the term "āyaka" as mentioned in the inscriptions. Longhurst says the precise meaning of the word is not known. It may be the corrupt form of the word ayakattu = ayam + kattu. "Ayam" in Sanskrit means "area" and "kattu" in its Dravidian root means "limiting" or "binding". Ayaka platforms are the four platforms in cardinal directions which symbolize the four roads at the meeting point of which "the Buddha suggested on his relics a stupa should be raised" (Das, *The Buddhist Architecture in Andhra*, p. 27).

36 These five pillars were erected to commemorate the five great events in the life of the Buddha: the great descent or nativity, mahabhinishkramana or renunciation, sambodhi or enlightenment, dharmachakra-pravartana or the first sermon, and mahaparinirvana or death. Emperor Ashoka erected pillars to commemorate these events in places where they were said to have taken place i.e. Lumbini, Kapilavastu, Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar. Longhurst suggests that the Andhrans installed these pillars on ayaka vedikas as they could not do it in the exact locations (Longhurst, "The Great Stupa at Nagarjunakonda", p. 188).

37 A.H. Longhurst, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*,

Vol. 54, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1999, p. 12.

38 *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XX (1929–30), p. 23.

39 This observation is based on the author's interaction with the staff of the Department of Heritage Telangana and the unpublished report submitted by them on the discovery of the reliquary.

40 Longhurst, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, p. 90. Jithendra Das suggests that in Amaravati, the reliquary was preserved in the place where it was discovered (*The Buddhist Architecture in Andhra*, p. 55).

41 Ibid.

42 Subrahmanyam et al.,*Interim Report*, p. 28.

43 *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XX (1929–30), p. 23.

44 Himanshu Prabha Ray, "Trade in the Deccan under the Satavahanas: Numismatic Evidence", in *The 3rd International Colloquium: Coinage, Trade & Economy*, edited by Amal Kumar Jha, Nashik: Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies, 1991, p. 58.

45 K.R. Subramanian, *Buddhist Remains in Andhra and The History of Andhra between 225 and 610 AD*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1989, p. iii.

46 Ray, *Life and Art of Early Andhradesa*, p. 24.

47 Subramanian, *Buddhist Remains in Andhra*, p. 21.

48 EIAD 114.

49 Rebecca Darley, "Worth and Value: Roman and Byzantine Coins in the Culture and Economy of Ancient Telangana", in *Proceedings of "Telangana through Ages"*, edited by Ganvir, Dalavi and Wirkud, Hyderabad: Department of Heritage Telangana, 2019, pp. 63–78.

50 Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India*, p. 115.

51 Das, *The Buddhist Architecture in Andhra*, p. 68.

52 *Indian Archaeology: 2003–04—A Review*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2011, p. 15. Though the IAR mentions the Vishnukundins in the timeline of Phanigiri, it is not supported by any archaeological evidence till date.

53 S. Baums, A. Griffiths, I. Strauch and V. Tournier, "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa: Results of Field Work in January and February 2016", *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. 102 (2016), pp. 355–98, https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01761838/document. The transcript of the inscription and the translation as given by the authors is quoted here. This reading seems to be the most accurate of all the readings and interpretations. The editors infer that the author has skilfully appropriated the language of other gods, pointing to the usage of Sanskrit in the first eight lines. "Such an apologetic stance is also clear from the very choice to include a versified portion in Sanskrit, a language that is used, in the Ikṣvāku corpus, primarily for donations to non-Buddhist gods, while the business portion of this Buddhist record is in Prakrit" (p. 370). In the same page, they add, "Indeed, the apologetic tone of the record, praising the Buddha for having destroyed the three poisons in a way that also stresses his superiority over both Śiva and Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, whose cults were favored by the Ikṣvāku kings, is quite remarkable, as noted by von Hinüber 2013b: 366–367."

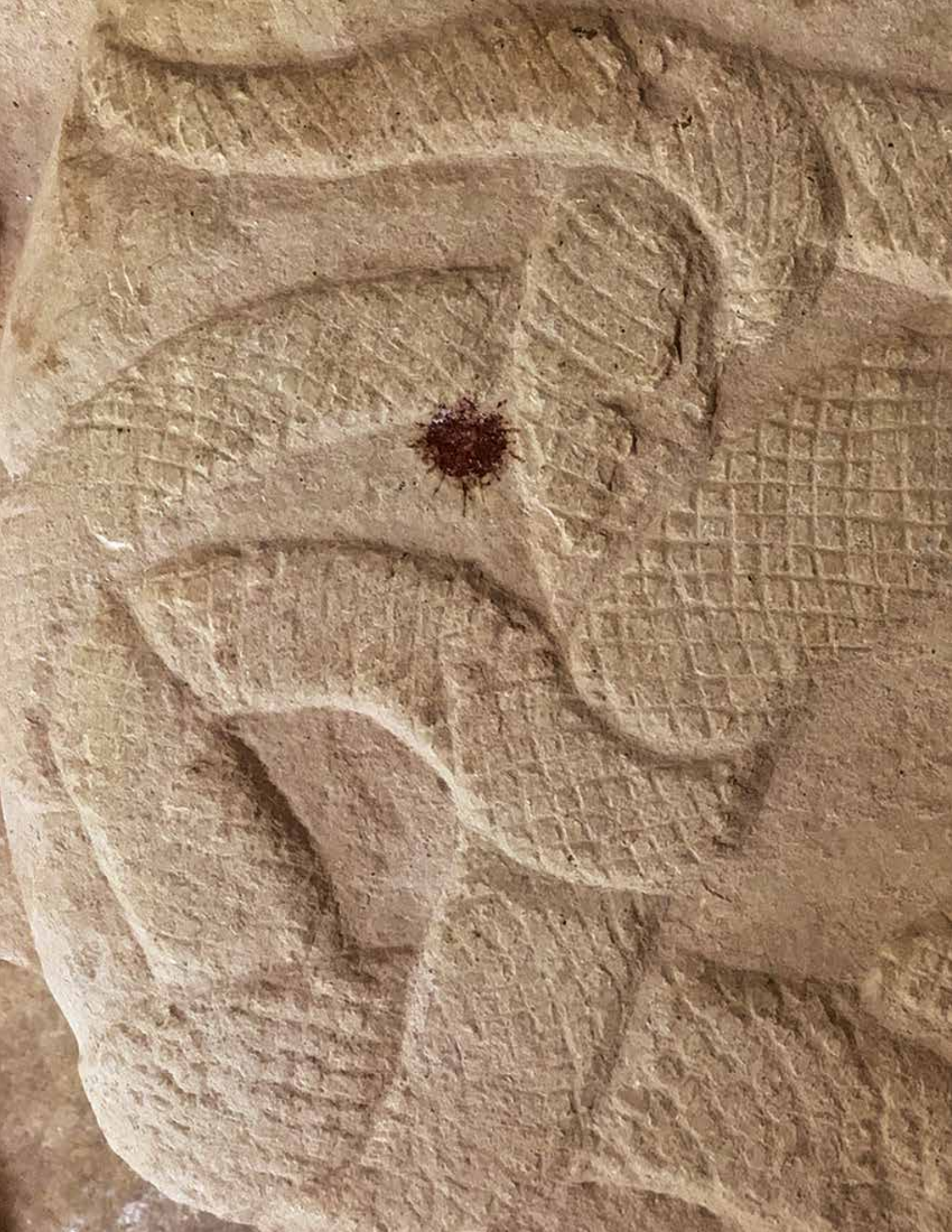
54 Sarkar and Misra, *Nagarjunakonda*, pp. 16–37.

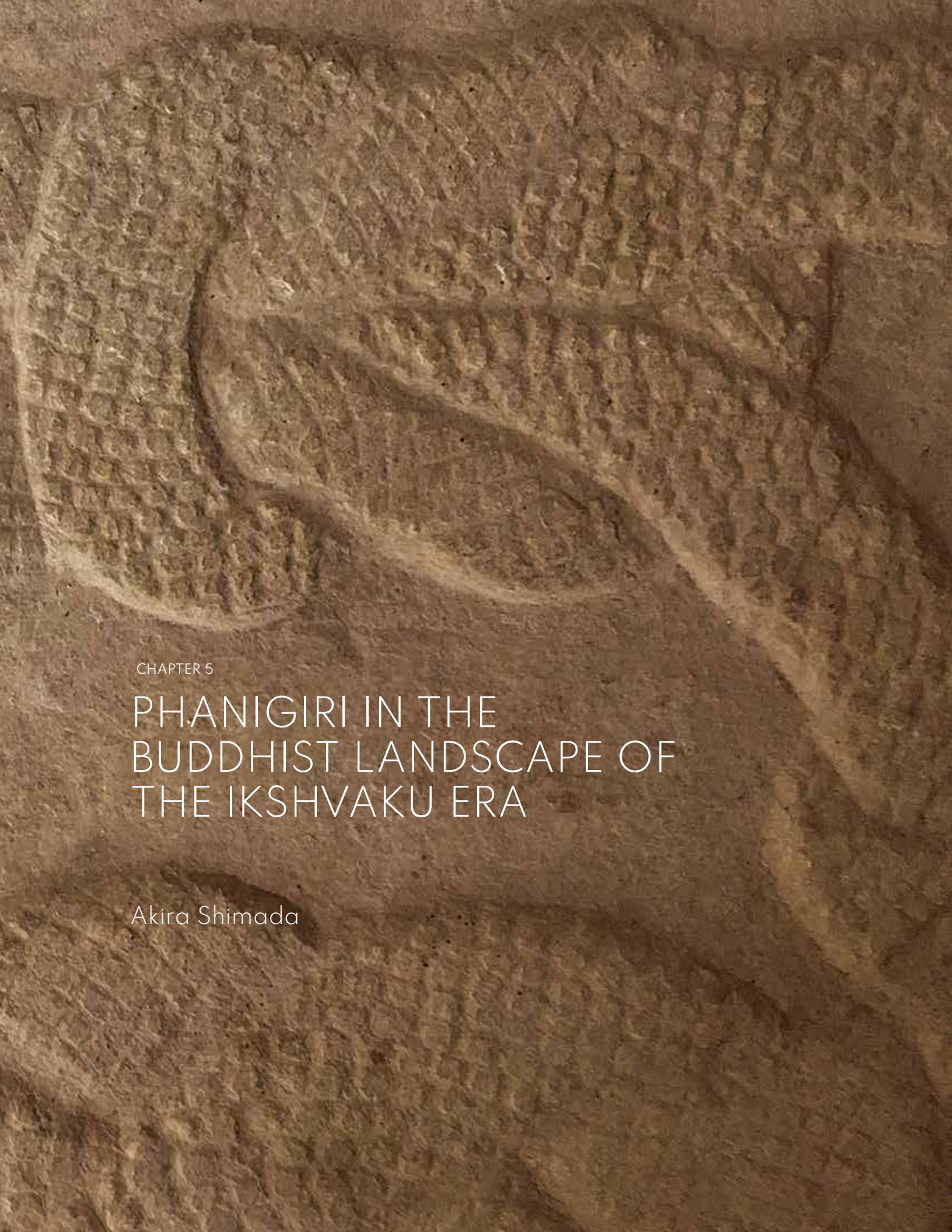
55 Darley, "Worth and Value", p. 63.

56 *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. 3, Part I, edited by R.C. Majumdar and K.K. Das Gupta, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1960, p. 316.

57 Subramanian, *Buddhist Remains in Andhra*, p. 31.

58 Alexander Rea, *South Indian Buddhist Antiquities*, Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Press, 1894, pp. 17–32.





CHAPTER 5

PHANIGIRI IN THE BUDDHIST LANDSCAPE OF THE IKSHVAKU ERA

Akira Shimada

Previous pages
5.1 Nagas protecting a stupa, detail from the drum slab in figure 5.6. Photograph: Naman P. Ahuja.

5.2 and 5.3 Drum slab depicting pilasters and a yaksha from Dhulikatta, at the Karimnagar Museum, Telangana. Photographs: Akira Shimada.

Since Colin Mackenzie's first survey of the Amaravati stupa in 1816–17, archaeological excavations and explorations have confirmed remains of more than a hundred early Buddhist monastic sites in the ancient Andhra region of the eastern Deccan. Apart from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in the Krishna river valley, most of these sites have not been fully studied yet. Moreover, the data provided by even these two sites is not comprehensive. While early excavations recorded many sculptures, inscriptions and other artefacts from the Amaravati stupa, the monastic complex that must have existed near the stupa remains unexcavated. A total of 28 monastic complexes found in the Nagarjunakonda valley were submerged under a lake created by a new dam, after a series of hasty excavations in the 1970s. The final report published about half a century after that does not provide full information on their findings either.[1] Our knowledge of early Buddhist monasticism of Andhra and its material culture is thus still limited and fragmented.

Recent excavations at Phanigiri have provided breakthroughs to fill some of this lacuna. Although the presence of remains at Phanigiri and its surroundings had been known since the 1950s, they received little attention among scholars, probably due to the assumption that Buddhist construction and artistic activities in this region were marginal compared to the lower Krishna valley. The 2001–07 excavations in Phanigiri by Andhra Pradesh State Archaeology (now Department of Heritage Telangana) showed such an assumption to be inadequate by revealing the extensive and well-preserved structures of a Buddhist monastic complex with abundant sculptures and inscriptions. The latest follow-up excavations by Deccan College in collaboration with the Telangana Department in 2018 uncovered further details of the monastery and its unique features. This chapter intends to highlight some of these discoveries and the key questions they pose by comparing them with the findings at other early Buddhist sites in Andhra.

5.4 and 5.5 Drum coping with inscription from Vardhamanukota, at the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum. Photographs: Vincent Tournier.

GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Phanigiri and its surroundings were highly-populated areas in the Early Historic Period (c. 300 BC–300 AD) and even earlier, as indicated by clusters of megalithic burials and early monastic remains that lie within a 10-km radius from Phanigiri (cf. Map on pp. 12–13; figures 1.3–1.5 and 1.8–1.9).[2] One of the main reasons for the development of these settlements was the area's strategic location, connecting the lower Krishna valley to the mid-Godavari river valley. It is also positioned as the middle point between Amaravati/Dhanyakataka, the flourishing urban centre of the lower Krishna valley since the 3rd century BC, and the Karimnagar region of the Godavari valley where sites such as Kadambapur, Peddabankur and Dhulikatta are concentrated.[3] Since the stylistic features of the limestone sculptures from the

Dhulikatta stupa (figures 5.2 and 5.3) are comparable with the earliest group of the Amaravati sculptures dated to the 2nd–1st centuries BC, we may assume that the Buddhist material culture of the lower Krishna valley spread to the mid-Godavari valley before the Christian Era. The foundations of Buddhist monasteries in the Phanigiri region were possibly laid during this time. The *Interim Report* produced after the 2001–07 excavations also dates the origins of the Phanigiri monastery to the 1st century BC, based on numismatic, archaeological and epigraphic evidence.[4] We should note, however, that current evidence supporting this dating is far from conclusive. As will be discussed shortly, recent numismatic research suggests that the coins of the Mahatalavaras, earlier dated to the period between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD by excavators, may pertain to the late 3rd century AD and after.[5] While excavators also noted the size of the bricks (54 x 27 x 7 cm) used for a vihara as another source of evidence for dating,[6] it cannot be a decisive clue to date the monument, as bricks are portable and are often reused.[7]

In contrast to the unclear picture on the earliest period of the Phanigiri monastery, ample epigraphic and art-historical evidence attests to the flowering of the monastery during and after the Ikshvaku period. Out of 42 inscriptions found at the site, the *Interim Report* published 15 inscriptions where the palaeography goes back to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.[8] An ongoing research project called *Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa* has thus far assembled and re-edited 21 Phanigiri inscriptions (EIAD 103–23).[9] They are from the period between the 3rd and mid-4th centuries AD save one inscription on a stone umbrella (EIAD 112) which shows early palaeography dated to the 1st–2nd centuries AD. As for the inscriptions found at the surrounding monastic sites, the only pre-Ikshvaku inscription with little doubt is one on a coping stone from Vardhamanukota (EIAD 236) (figures 5.4 and 5.5).[10] In terms of the sculptural evidence, two limestone rail pillars recently found at Vardhamanukota can be dated to the late 1st century AD (figure 5.7), because the intricate and naturalistic representation of the floral motif on the decorative band of the pillar shows the same stylistic features as the great limestone railing from Amaravati, particularly during its second phase of construction.[11] Phanigiri sculptures do not seem to include such early pieces. The structure showing the earliest stylistic features at Phanigiri is probably a drum slab from the main stupa (figures 5.1 and 5.6). The stout bodies of the large attendants and the simpler form of the stupa with cultic objects depicted on the drum are comparable with drum slabs from Nagarjunakonda Site 9 (figure 5.8), Dupadu (figure 5.9) and Chandavaram. While Elizabeth Rosen Stone has dated the drum slabs from Site 9 to the mid-3rd century AD, I would date these sculptures to the end of the 2nd century AD and the beginning of the 3rd century AD.[12] Another set of pieces that may look early are slabs depicting pilasters with half-lotus medallions that encase a stupa in an apsidal shrine (figure 5.10).[13] The slabs' simpler

5.6 Drum slab from the Phanigiri mahastupa, at the sculpture shed in Phanigiri. Photograph: John Guy.

5.7 Railing pillar from Vardhamanukota, at the State Archaeology Department, Hyderabad. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

5.8 Drum slab from Nagarjunakonda Site 9, at the Archaeological Museum, Nagarjunakonda. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

5.9 Drum slab from Dupadu, at the Amaravathi Heritage Centre and Museum. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

design is similar to those from Amaravati and other early Buddhist sites of Andhra.[14] The carving of the pilasters on the slabs, however, are comparable with the pillars constituting the so-called university complex of Nagarjunakonda (Site 3-32a) (figure 5.11) which yielded an Ikshvaku inscription (EIAD 77).[15] The rest of the Phanigiri sculptures, characterized by highly stylized decorative motifs, the anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha and dynamic postures of human figures with elongated bodies and limbs, are comparable with the Nagarjunakonda sculptures of the mature phase, dated roughly to the late 3rd century AD.[16] Because Phanigiri includes structures and sculptures that are not seen in Nagarjunakonda, such as a gateway (torana) and a large statue of a princely figure, some of the sculptures could be placed even later in the 4th century AD. This view is supported by the epigraphic evidence which proves the flourishing of the site in Year 18 of Rudrapurushadatta, the last king of the Ikshvaku dynasty (EIAD 104), whose reign is dated roughly to the first quarter of the 4th century AD.[17] The high period of the monastery thus was clearly later than Amaravati and even slightly later than Nagarjunakonda. As is well attested by ample archaeological and art-historical data, this was the period when most Buddhist monasteries in Andhra had already ceased large-scale construction work.

In what socio-political circumstances, then, did construction work flourish in Phanigiri in this comparatively late period? In the dynastic history, this was the time when the Ikshvaku dynasty replaced the Satavahanas and set their capital at Vijayapuri (currently Nagarjunakonda). The dynasty then ruled Andhra until the

emergence of the Shalankayanas and the Vishnukundins in the early 4th century AD. This period also saw the increased presence of the Shaka Kshatrapas from western Malwa to the Deccan.[18] The Ikshvakus' rule in Andhra seems to have relied on their strong relationship with the Shakas, forged through marital alliances. An ayaka pillar inscription from Nagarjunakonda Site 1 (EIAD 10), for example, records Rudradharabhatarika, a great queen (mahadevi) of king Virapurushadatta, as coming from Ujjain. A memorial pillar inscription from Nagarjunakonda Site 24 (EIAD 83) mentions that Vammabhatta, the wife of Ehuvala Chamtamula, was a daughter of a mahakshatrapa. These alliances may have increased the political importance of Phanigiri and the northern Telangana region, the principal gateway connecting the ancient Andhra region to western India. Of particular importance in this context is the hoard of lead coins discovered in the southeast corner of the platform of the main stupa at Phanigiri (cf. figure 4.26).[19] The accompanying legends on the ones which constitute the dominant coin type found in the area, inform us that they were issued by the Mahatalavaras. According to V.V. Mirashi and S. Bhandare, while their coins were found widely in Telangana and northern Rayalseema, the coins at Phanigiri, featuring a horse motif, are part of a "region-specific" type found exclusively in northern Telangana regions such as Koti Lingala, Peddabankur, Dhulikatta and Kondapur.[20] Because the formal features of the coins strongly suggest that they were modelled after the late Satavahana coins dated to c. 200–250 AD, Bhandare dated them to c. 250–350 AD.[21] This suggests that a local branch of Mahatalavaras attained political and/or economic autonomy in the northern Telangana region due to the decline of the Satavahanas. On account of the strategic importance of the region during the rule of the Ikshvakus, the Mahatalavaras may have enjoyed a special status as a local feudatory in this period and even after, as indicated by them issuing their own coins.[22] It is also likely that such political stability attained by the local rulers created a favourable environment to develop Buddhist construction work in the Phanigiri area during the 3rd–4th centuries AD.

THE LAYOUT OF THE MONASTERY

Such a relatively late development of the monastery and its strategic location between the Godavari and the Krishna river valleys seems to have given Phanigiri some distinctive features. Unlike the Amaravati stupa and many monasteries in the lower Krishna valley, it was built on the top of a granite hill. As N.R. Visalatchy has explained in the previous chapter, to cope with the limited and uneven ground, the monastic buildings were built on different levels connected by staircases. The highest terrace at the south end of the hill (Zone 4) accommodates the main stupa and a cluster of small stupas. Of the monk's residential area spreading to the north and northwest of the stupa terrace, the most outstanding section is undoubtedly the one adjacent to the stupa terrace (Zone 3). The section accommodates two apsidal shrines for stupas (Chaityagrihas 1 and 2 in the *Interim Report*), a square shrine with three Buddhapadas, a pillared hall, an octagonal hall enshrining a stupa, and three viharas (Viharas 1–3 in the *Interim Report*). The limestone sculptures found in the 2001–07 excavations were primarily in this area as well. This section of the monastery is also characterized by the three-dimensional layout of its monastic buildings. Two apsidal shrines, the Buddhapada shrine and the pillared hall in this area are built slightly lower than the level of the main stupa but are about 1.5 m higher than the front courtyard (figure 5.12). Access to these buildings from the main stupa and the courtyard is by staircase. Although the early Buddhist monasteries of Andhra

do not typically have such a three-dimensional layout of monastic buildings, a few comparative examples are a Brahmanical temple at Nagarjunakonda Site 99 and later Buddhist monasteries of Andhra such as Salihundam and Ramatirtham.[23] On the other hand, the remaining sections of the residential area spreading to the lower part of the hill to the north (Zones 1 and 2) show rather different features (figure 5.13). While these sections yielded several types of monastic buildings, such as pillared halls, a circular shrine, two apsidal shrines and rows of monastic cells, the excavations thus far have not yielded any decorative stone sculptures. Although the floor of the monastic cells is higher than the ground level, all buildings are on the same level. In short, compared to the buildings built on the upper part of the hill to the south, the northern part of the monastery appears to be plain and simple. Such unusual features of the monastic buildings in terms of their decorative scheme and the architectural plan may have been related to accessibility to different parts of the monastery for laypeople. As discussed earlier in this book, the main stupa located on the highest point of the hill was most likely the monument at the front of the complex; this along with the adjacent buildings embellished with sculpture may have functioned as the public area near the entrance where monks and laypeople interacted with each other. On the other hand, the lower northern area would be the inner residential area for the monks' religious life, and therefore had less decoration. Lars Fogelin's study of Thotlakonda in northern coastal Andhra indeed noticed such a division of public and non-public spaces in the monastery.[24] He refers to the centre of the monastery that consists of viharas, a pillared hall and circular chaityas as the cloister (figure 5.15). Because the central area is separated from the main stupa area or public worship space by a stone railing, he argued that this area was designed for maintaining the monks' secluded monastic life. He noted a similar layout in the monastery at nearby Bavikonda (figure 5.16).[25] Such different functions of monastic spaces may have been manifested in the embellishment of the Phanigiri architecture.

UNIQUE TYPES OF ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE

Another distinctive feature of the Phanigiri monastery is the presence of rare types of monastic architecture and architectural components that we do not see at other sites in Andhra. In terms of these types, perhaps the most unique is an octagonal shrine recently found at the front courtyard of Zone 3 (figure 5.17; cf. figure 4.12). In sculptural examples, A.K. Coomaraswamy noted about a century ago that the bodhi-shrine (bodhighara) carved on the Sanchi eastern gateway seems to have an octagonal shape.[26] Relief sculpture from the Kanaganahalli stupa in coastal Andhra (figure 5.18) also leads us to speculate on the presence of buildings with polygonal plans in the Deccan. As concrete archaeological evidence, however, Phanigiri has provided the first example of an octagonal shrine in the Buddhist monasteries of the Deccan. Examples of such shrines are rare even outside the Deccan. As far as I am aware, there are two examples of octagonal shrines in Taxila, Gandhara (A-1 shrine at Kalawan and I-3 shrine of the Dharmarajika stupa), dated to the 1st–2nd centuries AD.[27] There are also stupas of octagonal shapes at Bagh

5.10 Pilaster of the drum slab from one of the apsidal shrines in Zone 3 of Phanigiri. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

5.11 Pillar at Nagarjunakonda Site 3-32a. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

Cave 4 in western Malwa (c. the late 5th century AD) and at several Buddhist sites in the Kabul-Ghazni region of Afghanistan, such as Stupas 11 and 64 at Tapa Sardar (c. the late 6th century AD).[28] Although we can't be certain about the origin of the octagonal design of the shrine seen at Phanigiri, a concentration of comparative examples in the western and northwestern parts of the Indian subcontinent is interesting, because, as already discussed, the northern Telangana region seems to have been well connected to western India in the Ikshvaku period.

Equally intriguing are the apsidal shrines in Zones 1 and 3, since they form two double shrines and each pair stands next to the other facing the same direction (cf. figures 4.11, 4.14 and 4.15). While Nagarjunakonda yielded such double apsidal shrines attached to the monastery, most of the examples there accommodate a stupa in one shrine and an image in another shrine. Out of ten monasteries with double apsidal shrines, only two accommodate stupas in both shrines (Sites 5 and 26).[29] All of the double apsidal shrines in Nagarjunakonda stand facing each other. The pattern of such shrines standing side by side is thus rare, although there are comparable examples at Bavikonda and Pavuralakonda in northern coastal Andhra, at Ajanta (Caves 9 and 10) and at Pitalkhora (Caves 12 and 13) in the western Deccan.[30] An intriguing feature of this type is that one of the double shrines is usually smaller than the other. Although the reason for this remains unclear, it reminds us of the famous Sanchi stupa (Stupa 1) which has a smaller stupa (Stupa 3) enshrining the relics of Buddha's two great disciples, Sariputra and Mahamaudgalyayana, adjacent to it.[31]

Sculptures and architectural fragments found at the main stupa and the adjacent courtyard area in Zones 3 and 4 also exhibit unusual features. The main stupa (figure 5.14), while devoid of the stone railings and slabs encasing the dome of

5.14 The remains of the mahastupa in Phanigiri Zone 4. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

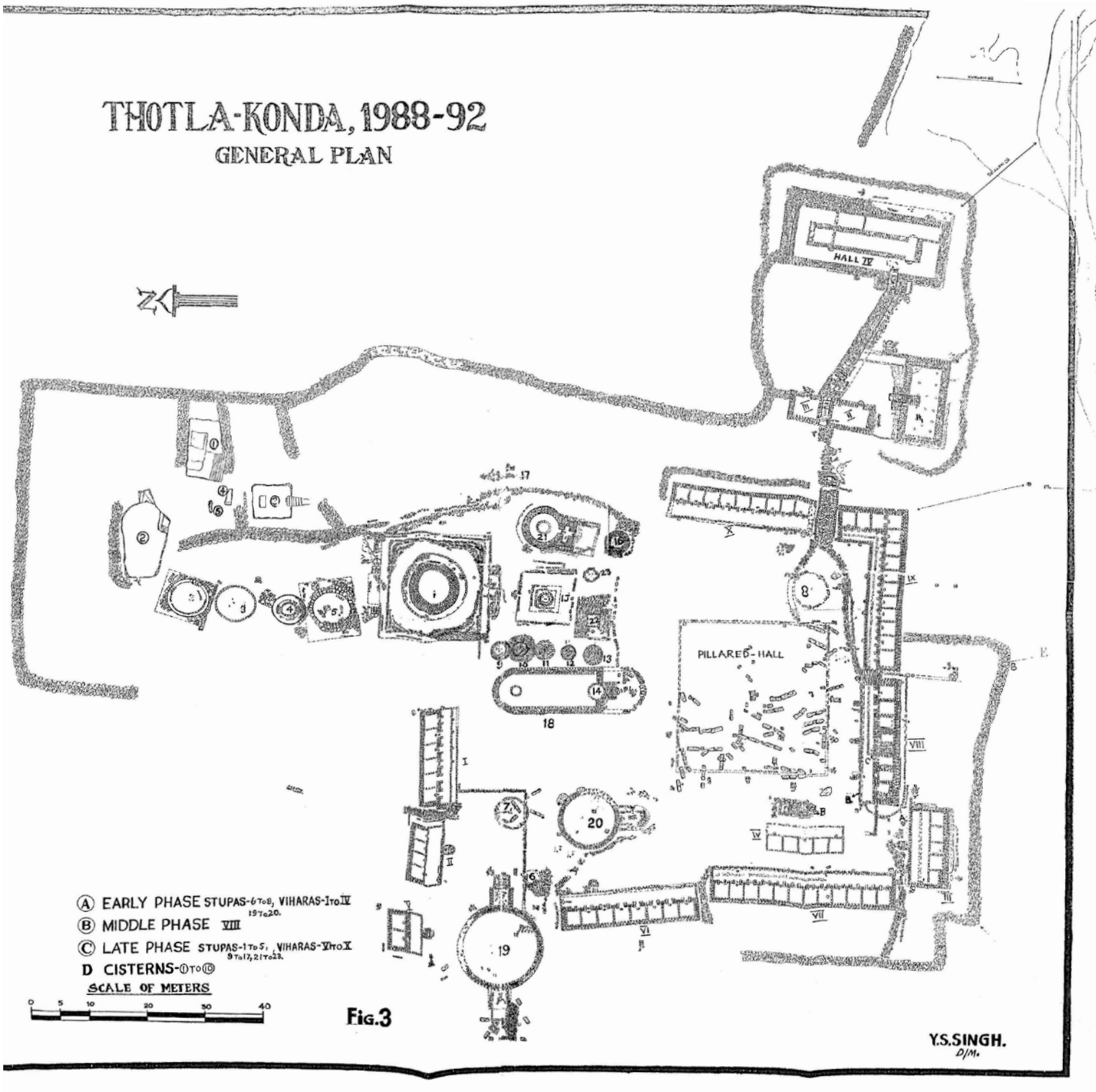
the stupa, has limestone friezes of two rows of lotus petals along the bottom of the drum (figure 5.19). In early Buddhist art of Andhra, this motif, commonly called the "double-lotus" in art history texts, typically appears in the reliefs of miniature stupas with simple decoration, such as the ones from Amaravati, Dupadu, Goli and Nagarjunakonda.[32] Structural stupas embellished with this motif are however rare, and examples were confined to smaller stupas in apsidal shrines, such as the ones at Nagarjunakonda Site 43 (figures 5.20 and 5.21). As far as the extant evidence is concerned, the Phanigiri main stupa is probably the only example that used this motif for embellishing the base of a large structural stupa. It is also interesting to note that, around the same period as the completion of the stupa, the first Buddha image seated on a double lotus seems to have been created in Nagarjunakonda (figure 5.22). The design of the stupa thus indicates the growing popularity of the double-lotus motif as the seat of the Buddha in the Ikshvaku period.[33]

As for the architectural fragment from the front courtyard of Zone 3, the largest one is a long octagonal pillar (height 357 cm, diameter 37 cm) that was originally surmounted by a wheel (dharmachakra) found at the southern side of the courtyard. Although Dhanyakataka also yielded such a dharmachakra pillar,[34] this pillar is thus far the largest one found in Andhra. As discussed in other chapters in this book, the accompanying inscription (EIAD 104) records the donation of the pillar by the chief physician of king Rudrapurushadatta in his 18th regnal year (cf. figures 1.22 and 1.23). As noted by scholars like Oskar von Hinüber and Stefan Baums, the inscription's reference to Shiva and Vishnu/Krishna and the use of Sanskrit in the versified portion is particularly remarkable as it indicates the growing dominance of Brahmanical religion and the language.[35]

The courtyard area also yielded a variety of architectural fragments decorated with narrative sculptures (cf. figure 6.2). As discussed by Naman Ahuja in the concluding chapter of this book, a fine piece in this category is a pillar fragment depicting scenes related to the great departure of Prince Siddhartha (cf. figure 7.2). Although Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda yielded pillars that arrange narrative

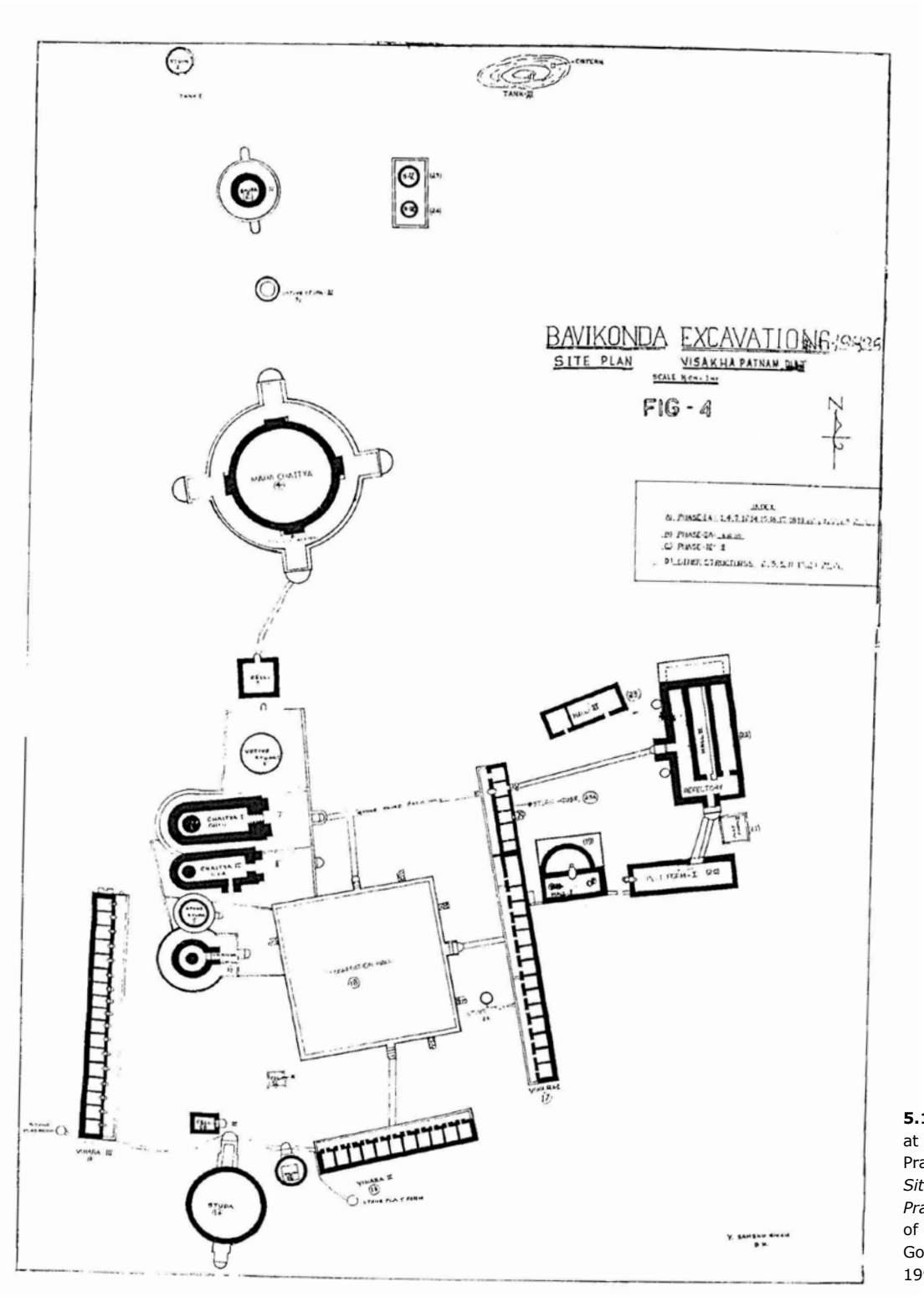
5.12 Remains of apsidal shrines and the front courtyard in Phanigiri Zone 3. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

5.13 Remains from Phanigiri Zones 1 and 2. Photograph: Akira Shimada.



5.15 Plan of the monastery at Thotlakonda. Source: V.V. Krishna Sastry, B. Subrahmanyam and N. Rama Krishna Rao, *Thotlakonda, a Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1992.

A number of Buddhist complexes comparable to Phanigiri are becoming known to scholars now. The presence of a mahastupa, smaller "votive" stupas, long rows of cells that make up viharas, congregational halls, and two apsidal temples beside each other become quite typical of the 3rd century AD constructions.



5.16 Plan of the monastery at Bavikonda. Source: N.R.V. Prasad, *Bavikonda: A Buddhist Site in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1994, fig. 4.

5.17 Shrine with an octagonal base in Phanigiri Zone 3. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

scenes in vertical formats, the Amaravati examples are small pilasters attached to the drum of the stupa.[36] The Nagarjunakonda examples are drum pilasters or tall hero stones depicting the accomplishments of the Ikshvaku royal figures. The format of the narrative pillar at Phanigiri thus appears to be a new type combining existing formats of vertical narrative panels from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. As highlighted by Parul Pandya Dhar's chapter in this book, the gateway discovered at the courtyard is the only example of a stone torana found in Buddhist Andhradesha (cf. figures 6.8 and 6.9).[37] While both sides of the two lintels are fully covered with narrative sculptures such as the Stupa I toranas at Sanchi, the shape of the gateway is a local type, depicted frequently in the Amaravati sculptures. As discussed by John Guy, another unique type of architectural element are the rectangular panels with railing patterns, used for dividing the courtyard and for a parapet in a Zone 1 vihara (cf. figure 3.16). While panels with a similar design were found at Site 3 of Nagarjunakonda, this kind that divides monastic spaces has thus far been found only at Phanigiri.[38]

In addition to the architectural fragments, Phanigiri's courtyard yielded a few statues in the round of the Buddha and a princely figure (cf. figures 1.13–1.16). Particularly impressive is the headless body of the princely figure found at the right

end of the front courtyard (cf. figures 3.18, 4.35 and 4.36).[39] Like the gateway, the discovery of this statue surprised scholars because the large statues in the round found at other early Buddhist sites of Andhra were almost exclusively standing images of the Buddha. Although a few statues of princely figures were found from Amaravati, Etravaripalem (figure 5.24) and Tirumalagiri, they haven't received as much scholarly attention due to their relatively small size and damaged conditions.[40] With regard to the non-Buddhist figures in general, while Nagarjunakonda yielded a few statues of Brahmanical deities, such as a yaksha and Kartikeya, they are all small images.[41] Although the identification of the statue remains problematic, the discovery of the Phanigiri headless figure is significant, since it requires us to revisit our understanding of the genre of large statues created in early Andhra art.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, a close study of Phanigiri's features significantly extends our knowledge of early Buddhist monasticism and the material culture of the ancient Andhra region. The archaeology of the site proves that the inland area between the Godavari and Krishna river valleys came into the network of Buddhist monasteries in Andhra in the early centuries AD. It saw some remarkable construction and embellishment activity in the 3rd–4th centuries AD, a relatively late period when many Buddhist monasteries in Andhra had already ceased such work. We may assume that this was driven by the political importance of this region in the Ikshvaku era and the growing power of the local feudatory that had close relationships with the ruling dynasty. Phanigiri also urges us to change our understanding of Buddhist art and architecture in the Ikshvaku period. Represented by Nagarjunakonda, the Buddhist sculptures of this period have often been regarded as showing the deterioration of the Amaravati school of art.[42] The superb aesthetic quality of the Phanigiri sculptures contradicts this view. It is also notable that the works include many uncommon types, such as the gateway, screen panels dividing the courtyard, and standing statues of male figures. The embellishment seems different from the usage at other Andhra monasteries such as Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda where sculptures embellished the stupas. Is the embellishment programme at Phanigiri a reflection of a local artistic tradition, or does it point to unnoticed features in Buddhist art and architecture in that region during that period? Did this tradition continue or cease after the construction of Phanigiri? To examine these questions, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth survey of other Buddhist sites surrounding Phanigiri. For example, Tirumalagiri, located 8 km north of Phanigiri, yielded male statues and pillar fragments (figure 5.23) showing close stylistic similarities with material found at Phanigiri. The ruin of "a huge Buddhist stupa" to the west of the Tirumalagiri village is still unexcavated.[43] Vardhamanukota seems to have started large-scale construction work earlier than Phanigiri as indicated by tall mandapa pillars, an inscription (see figures 5.4 and 5.5) and fully sculpted rail pillars.[44] Since the

5.18 Drum slab depicting a tree-shrine from Kanaganahalli. Photograph: Christian Luczanits.

site yielded little material evidence belonging to the Ikshvaku period except for a Buddha statue, the monastery's relationship with Phanigiri is not yet understood.[45] Although the two trial excavations at Gajulabanda in 1970–71 and 1978–79 seem to have yielded some important discoveries, the full report is still unpublished.[46] Excavated objects, which include "two sculpted lions carved on limestone" have not been studied yet because, as far as I know, they are not on display in the museums. Discoveries at Phanigiri strongly urge us to revisit these forgotten sites for a comprehensive understanding of the local historical milieu that supported the creation of such impressive art and architecture in early Andhradesha.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Naman P. Ahuja, N.R. Visalatchy, Mallu Naik and the staff at the Department of Heritage Telangana for arranging my access to Phanigiri and sharing the latest information on the site and its surroundings. I thank John Guy, Aditya Madav and Harsha Vardhan who accompanied my trips to Phanigiri and assisted in documentation of the site and its sculptures. I am grateful to Kurt Behrendt, Pia Brancaccio, Arlo Griffiths, Christian Luczanits, Nicholas Morrissey, Kalyani Ramachandran and Vincent Tournier who

5.19 Frieze of double lotuses on the drum of the mahastupa at Phanigiri. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

5.20 and 5.21 Stupa with double lotuses in the apsidal chaitya at Nagarjunakonda Site 43. Photographs: Akira Shimada.

5.22 Seated Buddha on a double lotus from Nagarjunakonda, at the Reserve Collection, Archaeological Museum, Nagarjunakonda. Photograph: Akira Shimada.

5.23 Pillar fragment from Tirumalagiri, part of the Reserve Collection, State Maritime Museum, Visakhapatnam. Photograph: John Guy.

gave me their valuable inputs to improve the article and shared their resources with me. I am grateful to Shailendra Bhandare who kindly allowed me to consult his unpublished article, read my draft and gave me constructive feedback. Finally, I am thankful to Robert DeCaroli and Mavis Pilbeam who carefully proofread my final draft.

ENDNOTES

1 *Nagarjunakonda (1954–60): Volume II (The Historical Period)*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 75, edited by K.V. Soundara Rajan, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2006, pp. 157–58.

2 *The Archaeological Bulletin*, edited by P. Sreenivasachar, Issue 2, No. 2 (1963), p. 5, figs. 31, 33; V.V. Krishna Sastry, *Proto and Early Historical Cultures of Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1983, pp. 145–47; Gregory Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004, p. 361; B. Subrahmanyam, J. Vijaya Kumar, G.V. Ramakrishna Rao and K.S.B. Kesava, *Phanigiri: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh, An Interim Report, 2001–07*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2008, pp. 3–5.

3 V.V. Krishna Sastry, *Proto and Early Historical Cultures*, pp. 83–87, 124–25.

4 B. Subrahmanyam, P. Brahma Chary and K. Padmanabha, *Mahatalavara Coins: A Hoard from Phanigiri, Nalgonda District*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2008, p. 6.

5 Ibid., p. 26; S. Bhandare, "Numismatic Landscape of the Andhra Country: c. 1st–4th centuries CE", in *Vijayapurī to Śrikṣetra? Beginning of Buddhist Exchange across the Bay of Bengal*, edited by A. Griffiths, A. Shimada and V. Tournier, Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient (forthcoming).

6 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, p. 27.

7 Lars Fogelin, *Archaeology of Early Buddhism*, Lanham and Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2006, p. 94.

8 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, pp. 32–38. The report dated an inscription attached to the Buddhapada to the 1st–2nd centuries AD although *Indian Archaeology 2004–2005*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, p. 206, no. 6 and EIAD 109 dated the same inscription to c. 4th century AD.

9 This online corpus, mainly compiled and edited by Stefan Baums, Arlo Griffiths, Ingo Strauch and Vincent Tournier, is a publication of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (Paris, France), realized in collaboration with the HiSoMA Research Centre (Lyon, France) and hosted by TGIR Huma-Num (France), http://hisoma.huma-num.fr/exist/apps/EIAD/index2.html.

10 According to Vincent Tournier, the inscription consists of an incomplete donation record to the left and a complete one to the right. The reading of the first record is "///sa dānaṁ" ("gift of…") and that of the second is "°upāsikāya budharakhitāya dānaṁ" ("gift of the lay follower Buddharakkhitā"). On the transliteration conventions adopted in the EIAD corpus, see S. Baums, A. Griffiths, I. Strauch and V. Tournier, "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa: Results of Fieldwork in January and February 2016", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. 102 (2016), p. 358, no. 14. Palaeographically, it shows close similarity to a Kanaganahalli inscription dated to Year 35 of

5.24 Male torso from Etravaripalem, at the Baudhasree Archaeological Museum, Guntur (BMG 96). Photograph: Akira Shimada.

King Pulumavi (Maiko Nakanishi and Oskar von Hinüber, "Kanaganahalli Inscriptions", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2012*, Vol XVI (2013); Supplement, 2014, no. I.8.) I thank Dr Tournier for providing the reading of this unpublished inscription and assessment of the palaeography.

11 Akira Shimada, *Early Buddhist Architecture in Context: The Great Stūpa at Amarāvatī (ca. 300 BCE–300 CE)*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013, pp. 99–102.

12 Elizabeth Rosen Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994, pp. 55–56; Akira Shimada, "Beginning of the Buddhist Art of Nagarjunakonda: Sculptures from Sites 6 and 9", in *Vijayapurī to Śrikṣetra?* (forthcoming).

13 Peter Skilling, "New Discoveries from South India: The Life of the Buddha at Phanigiri, Andhra Pradesh", *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2008), pp. 96–118, fig. 4.

14 Shimada, *Early Buddhist Architecture in Context*, pls. 50–51.

15 The same complex also yielded a balustrade that shows a close similarity with a balustrade attached to Vihara 1 (Zone 3) of Phanigiri.

16 Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, pp. 58–81.

17 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, pp. 33–34, no. 3; Peter Skilling and Oskar von Hinüber, "An Epigraphical Buddhist Poem from Phanigiri (Andhrapradesh) from the time of Rudrapuruṣadatta", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2010*, Vol. XIV (2011), pp. 7–12; Oskar von Hinüber, "Again on the Donation made by the Vinayadhara Dhammasena and on Other Inscriptions from Phanigiri", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2012*, Vol. XVI (2013), pp. 3–12; Baums et.al., "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa", pp. 369–77. As for the reign of the king, see Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, pp. 5–6.

18 Epigraphic evidence indicating this movement is found in a Nasik inscription recording a gift to the sangha by a daughter of Shaka Agnivarman in the reign of King Ishvarasena of the Abhiras (c. 3rd century AD). See E. Senart, "The Inscriptions in the Caves at Nasik", *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 8, No. 15 (1905–06); K. Tsukamoto, *Indo Bukkyō himei no kenkyū (A Comprehensive Study of the Indian Buddhist Inscriptions). Part I: Text, Notes and Japanese Translation*, Kyoto: Heirakuji-shoten, 1996.

19 Subrahmanyam, Brahma Chary and Padmanabha, *Mahatalavara Coins*.

20 V.V. Mirashi, "A Coin of Mahatalavarasa", *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. 15 (1976), p. 117; Bhandare, "Numismatic Landscape of the Andhra Country" (forthcoming).

21 Bhandare, "Numismatic Landscape of the Andhra Country" (forthcoming).

22 Although the relationship with the coins from Phanigiri is unclear, ayaka pillar inscriptions from Stupa 1 at Nagarjunakonda record Mahatalavara as a title of the husband of Chatisiri, the daughter of the first Ikshvaku king Chamtamula (EIAD 4, 6–11, 13–19, 58). This indicates that a branch of the Mahatalavaras had marital relationships with the Ikshvakus.

23 Soundara Rajan, *Nagarjunakonda (1954–60)*, 2006, pp. 209–12, pl. LXIX A; R. Subrahmanyam, *Salihundam: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1964; A. Rea, "Buddhist Monasteries on the Gurubhakakoṇḍa and Durgakoṇḍa Hills at Rāmatīrtham", in *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India, 1910–11*, Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India, 1911, pp. 78–88.

24 Fogelin, *Archaeology of Early Buddhism*, pp. 157–75.
25 Ibid., pp. 97–101.
26 A.K. Coomaraswamy, "Early Indian Architecture", *Eastern Art*, Vol. II (1930), p. 231.
27 H. Sarkar, *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India* (2nd edition), New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993, p. 30; Kurt Behrendt, "Reuse of Images in Ancient Gandhara", *Gandhāran Studies*, Vol. 2 (2008), p. 24; Idem., "Relic Shrines of Gandhāra: A Reinterpretation of the Archaeological Evidence", in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, Text*, edited by Kurt Behrendt and Pia Brancaccio, Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2006, p. 84.
28 Shoshin Kuwayama, "The Horizon of Begram III and Beyond: A Chronological Interpretation of the Evidence for Monuments in the Kāpiśī-Kabul-Ghazni Region", *East and West*, Vol. 41, No. 1/4 (1991), pp. 95–97, 111.
29 Sarkar, *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture*, p. 81.
30 N.R.V. Prasad, *Bavikonda: A Buddhist Site in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh*, Archaeological Series, No. 72, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1994, pp. 21–22.
31 About placing the relics of the Buddha and his disciples inside the monastery, see Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*, pp. 304–05.
32 Robert Knox, *Amaravati: Buddhist Sculpture from the Great Stūpa*, London: British Museum Press, 1992, nos. 64, 66; Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, figs. 93–96, 98, 100–01.
33 Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 110.
34 P. Seshadri Sastri, "Dharanikota Dharmachakra Pillar Inscription", *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 24 (1937–1938), pp. 256–60.
35 Oskar von Hinüber, "Behind the Scenes: The Struggle of Political Groups for Influence as Reflected in Inscriptions", *Indo-Iranian Journal (2013),* pp. 366–67; Baums et al., "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa", p. 371.
36 For example, see Knox, *Amaravati*, nos. 83–86.
37 Another piece that could be a part of a torana is the sculpture of a makara in the Baudhasree Archaeological Museum, Guntur (Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 173). See figure 6.5 on p. 157. It is possible, however, that this piece was a part of a pillar or a part of a large throne too.
38 Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, figs. 155, 157.
39 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, p. 16.
40 James Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta in the Krishna District, Madras Presidency, Surveyed in 1882. With Translations of the Aśoka Inscriptions at Jaugadi and Dhauli by George Bühler*, Archaeological Survey of Southern India, Vol. 6, London: Trubner and Co., 1887, pl. 52-9; S.S. Gupta, *Sculptures and Antiquities in the Archaeological Museum, Amarāvatī*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2008, pls. 55–56.
41 Soundara Rajan, *Nagarjunakonda (1954–60)*, pls. 79A, 93, 95A, 95C.
42 D. Barrett, *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum*, London: British Museum Press, 1954, p. 42.
43 Krishna Sastry, *Proto and Early Historical Cultures*, p. 147.
44 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, p. 3.
45 Ibid. I have not seen this statue. I do not know the current location of the statue either.
46 *Indian Archaeology 1970–1971*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, pp. 3–4: Krishna Sastry, *Proto and Early Historical Cultures*, pp. 146–47; Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, p. 3.

CHAPTER 6

READING ARCHITECTURE, CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVE
VISUALIZING THE PHANIGIRI TORANA

Parul Pandya Dhar

Previous pages
For details about the image, refer to p. 169.

6.1 Stepped pathway leading to the Phanigiri mahastupa from the north. Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar.

6.2 The cache of torana fragments and other sculptures recovered from the courtyard zone of Phanigiri in 2002–03. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

6.3 The north torana of the Sanchi mahastupa. Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar.

At the dawn of the third millennium, in 2002–03, archaeologists uncovered a remarkable cache of limestone sculptures from the ancient Buddhist complex of Phanigiri in Telangana, south India (figure 6.1).[1] Unearthed a little distance to the north-northwest of the mahastupa, these fragments revealed close affinities with the celebrated Buddhist art of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda (c. 2nd–4th centuries AD) from the contiguous state of Andhra Pradesh. Architrave fragments with composite animal terminals and gently curving crossbars portraying the Buddha's biography and other narratives were part of the recovered cache of objects at Phanigiri (figure 6.2).[2] These drew special attention as much for their visual appeal as for the intrigue surrounding their purpose. So unusual was this find in the Deccan, that in the *Interim Report* on Phanigiri excavations for the years 2001–07, the two larger architraves have been mistakenly identified as "balustrades"![3] The obvious inference that these were architraves of a grand torana built in association with the mahastupa located on the eponymous serpentine hillock of Phanigiri had eluded the experienced archaeologists. Such an omission could perhaps be attributed to their conditioned gaze: carved though toranas may be on relief sculptures, an actual, structural stone torana had thus far *never* been encountered in the archaeological

6.4 Scene of Siddhartha's birth carved on an ayaka slab with shardula-makaras at the terminals. Courtesy Archaeological Museum, Nagarjunakonda. Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar.

landscape of early historic southern India! The Phanigiri torana's unique presence and significance is the subject of my chapter. I offer a reconstruction by examining its architectural design in intimate association with the iconography and configuration of narratives visualized on its architraves.[4]

TORANAS IN THE BUILT LANDSCAPE OF EARLY BUDDHIST INDIA

From about the 2nd century BC, toranas built in association with religious and civic architecture find mention in ancient Indian texts and inscriptions; they are also noticed in relief sculptures in pan-Indic contexts.[5] These early toranas were variously located at entrances to cities, forts and palaces, and were found in association with Buddhist and Jaina stupas and tree-shrines. The toranas of the Bharhut and Sanchi stupas in north-central India are the earliest and best-known free-standing examples; but there is sufficient evidence to indicate that they were also found elsewhere in the region. These toranas had origins in wooden architecture of an earlier period and had acquired a distinct post-and-lintel form in stone by the 2nd century BC. Their basic structure included two pillars that usually supported three curvilinear architraves (figure 6.3).

The early Buddhist toranas of northern India functioned as entryways and punctuated vedikas (railings) enclosing important stupas. Replete with Buddhist motifs, symbols and narratives, they marked the liminal zone between the outer and inner worlds of a Buddhist habitat. Monastic structures such as chaityas, viharas and shila-mandapas were located outside the space enclosed by the vedika and toranas. Beyond monastic structures was the world of the laity. An important stupa could have a single torana, marking sacred space at its main axis of access, or there could be up to four toranas, punctuating a vedika in the cardinal directions.

In the Deccan and south India, prior to the spectacular discovery of the Phanigiri torana fragments, no definitive evidence of such a free-standing stone torana had been found.[6] The closest though slim parallel is offered by what may have been a torana architrave terminal presently housed in the Baudhasree Archaeological Museum, Guntur (figure 6.5). Of unknown provenance, it depicts a composite shardula-makara (lion-sea dragon) similar to one of the Phanigiri architrave terminals, indicating the plausible presence of more Phanigiri-type toranas in the

6.5 Composite shardula-makara (lion-sea dragon) at the Baudhasree Archaeological Museum, Guntur. Courtesy John Guy.

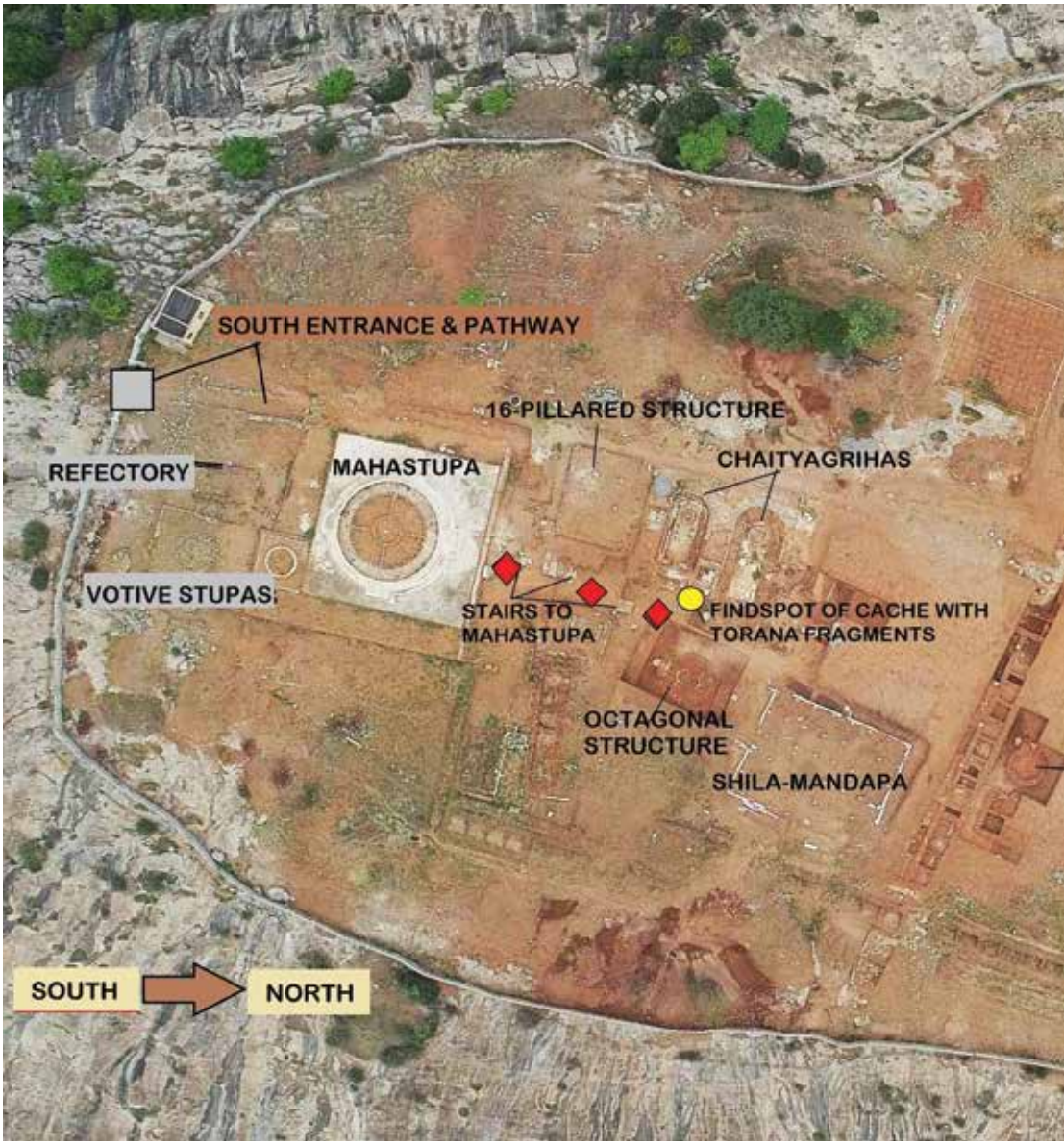
ancient Andhra belt.[7] Although the Guntur evidence may be too sparse to arrive at its decisive identification as a torana fragment, two Buddhist inscriptions in Ikshvaku-period ornamental Brahmi script from Ghantasala in Andhra Pradesh present stronger evidence of the presence of free-standing toranas in the region. These inscriptions, however, do not make it clear whether the said torana was built in wood or stone.[8]

Significantly, toranas in association with Buddhist monuments are carved in many a relief sculpture from the Deccan and south India. At the Gautamiputra vihara in Nashik, a torana is carved on the doorway leading into the cave's interior.[9] In some of the relief sculptures from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, toranas are shown flanking a stupa.[10] This is of interest as the stupa's organizational logic in the Andhra belt, as observed in miniature representations on drum slabs and in archaeological reconstructions, does not reveal the presence of toranas as part of gateways punctuating the railings.[11] It is likely that these toranas may have stood close to the stupa gateways but may not have punctuated the vedika. Until the discovery of the Phanigiri torana fragments, one presumed that this architectural element was perhaps made in wood in the southern parts of ancient India. Phanigiri changes this perception effectively and provokes a more careful investigation of its apparent absence.

SITUATING THE TORANA ON THE PHANIGIRI HILLTOP

The *Interim Report* on Phanigiri excavations published in 2008 mentions that the cache with several architectural fragments and sculpted panels recovered in

2002–03 may have been collected and buried together at some later date.[12] These fragments, including the torana architraves, were unearthed close to the eastern end of the southern pair of chaityagrihas atop the Phanigiri hill (figure 6.6). As no part of the torana was found in situ, it is difficult to locate it precisely within the Phanigiri Buddhist complex. But it is still possible to infer its approximate location based on the site plan and findspot. The Phanigiri mahastupa is located very close to the southern edge of the site. South of the mahastupa, where the ground begins to slope downhill, remains of a refectory and some votive stupas have been discovered. In ancient times, the Buddhist complex could also be accessed from the south through a pathway located close to the western side of the mahastupa. However, the southern side and southwestern pathway are too narrow to have made space for a grand and ornate torana. The present access to the Phanigiri Buddhist complex is from the north. Approaching from the north entrance and moving southwards towards the mahastupa along the north-south axis, one crosses chaityagrihas,

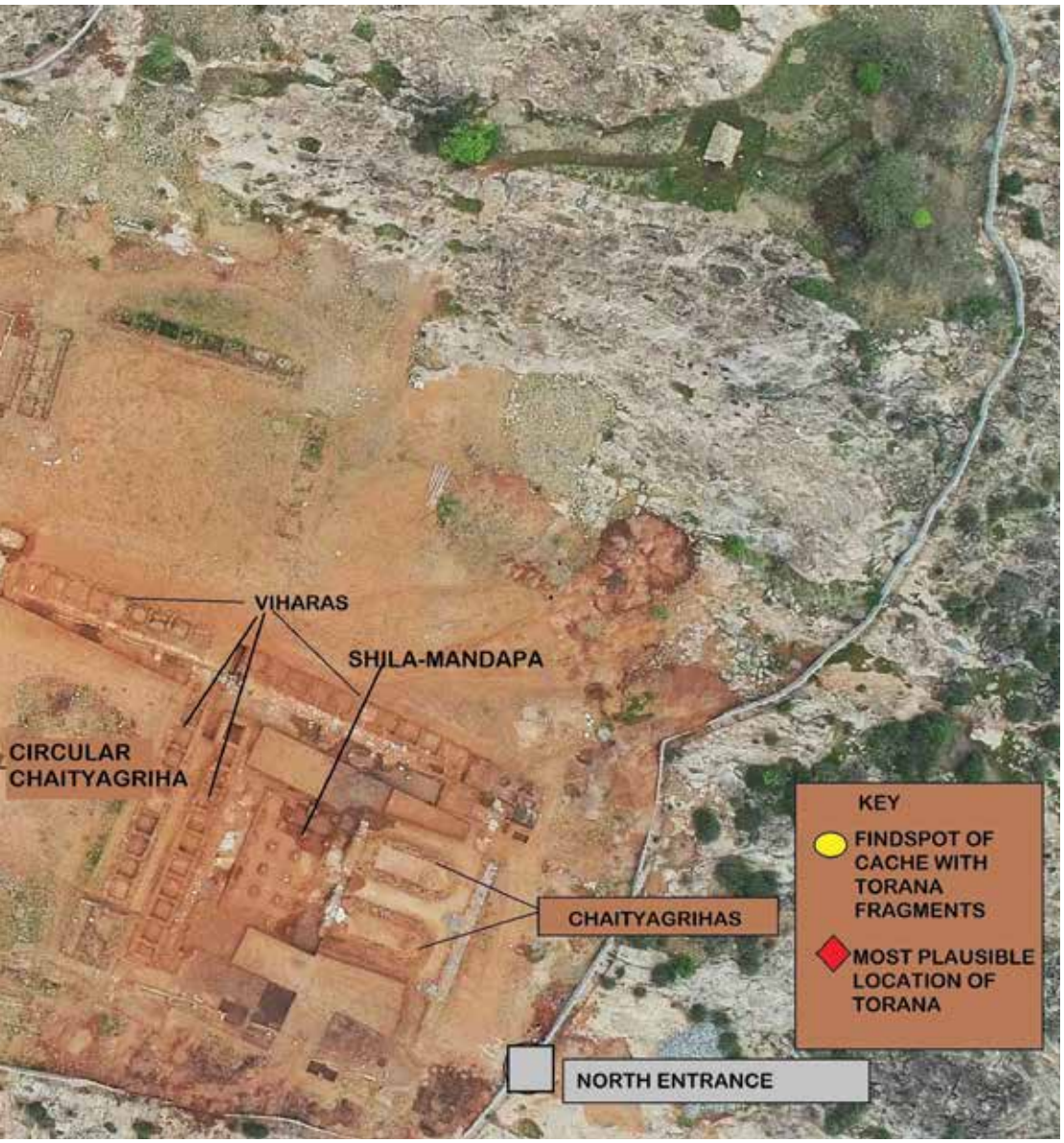


6.6 Site layout of the Phanigiri Buddhist complex marking the findspot of the torana fragments and the plausible location of the torana. Drone image courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Modified image © Parul Pandya Dhar.

shila-mandapas and viharas to arrive at a pathway paved in stone with stairs that lead to the mahastupa. This pathway is in the vicinity of the findspot of the torana fragments. It is also in the proximity of some of the most important structures of the complex: the mahastupa, the southern pair of chaityagrihas and a recently excavated large octagonal structure. In all likelihood, the torana's original location was close to the northern side of the mahastupa, in the vicinity of the southern chaityas and the octagonal structure, along the stepped pathway that led to the mahastupa from the north (see figure 6.6).

THE ARCHITRAVES: MEASURE, ICONOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE

During site visits in January 2017 and June 2018, I had access to three sizeable torana architrave fragments (excavation numbers 4, 5 and 7) housed in the store maintained by the Department of Heritage Telangana at Phanigiri. Besides these, I was able to locate at least four smaller broken architrave parts in the architectural



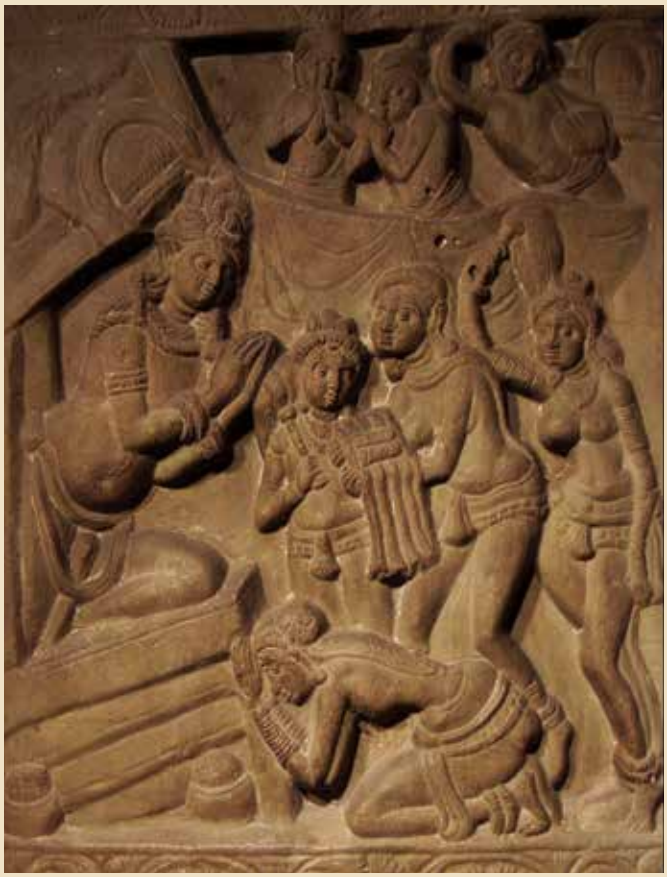
A

B

6.7 Four panels showing Shakyavardhana paying obeisance to the bodhisatva. (A) Chandavaram, State Museum, Hyderabad. (B) Amaravati, British Museum, London. (C) Nagarjunakonda, Archaeological Museum, Nagarjunakonda. (D) Phanigiri, Department of Heritage Telangana. Composite image © Parul Pandya Dhar.

debris that had been collected and kept in the storehouse. From an earlier published photograph, I observed that there was another sizeable architrave fragment of which only a small part (fragment X) could be located during my visits.[13] Architraves 5 and 7 are the largest, followed by architrave 4. All three are exquisitely carved on the front and rear sides, each with a distinct addorsed composite animal figure with riders at the terminals—shardula-makara (4), hasti-makara (5) and griffin-makara (7).[14] Square and circular mortise holes are marked at the top and bottom of the architraves for affixing tenons to connect them with successive architectural members of the torana. A unique feature is the ordered progression of the Buddha's biographical narratives on the front faces of the architraves.[15] The front sides of the architraves can be discerned due to a slight turn of the composite animals' heads towards the side depicting the Buddha's biographical narratives.

A composite shardula-makara terminal followed by a cuboid die (55 x 39 x 27 cm) and a tiny part of the curvilinear band is all that has survived of architrave 4 (figure 6.12). The entire piece measures 123 cm in length and is the smallest of the three main surviving architrave fragments. It is similar to the composite motif presently



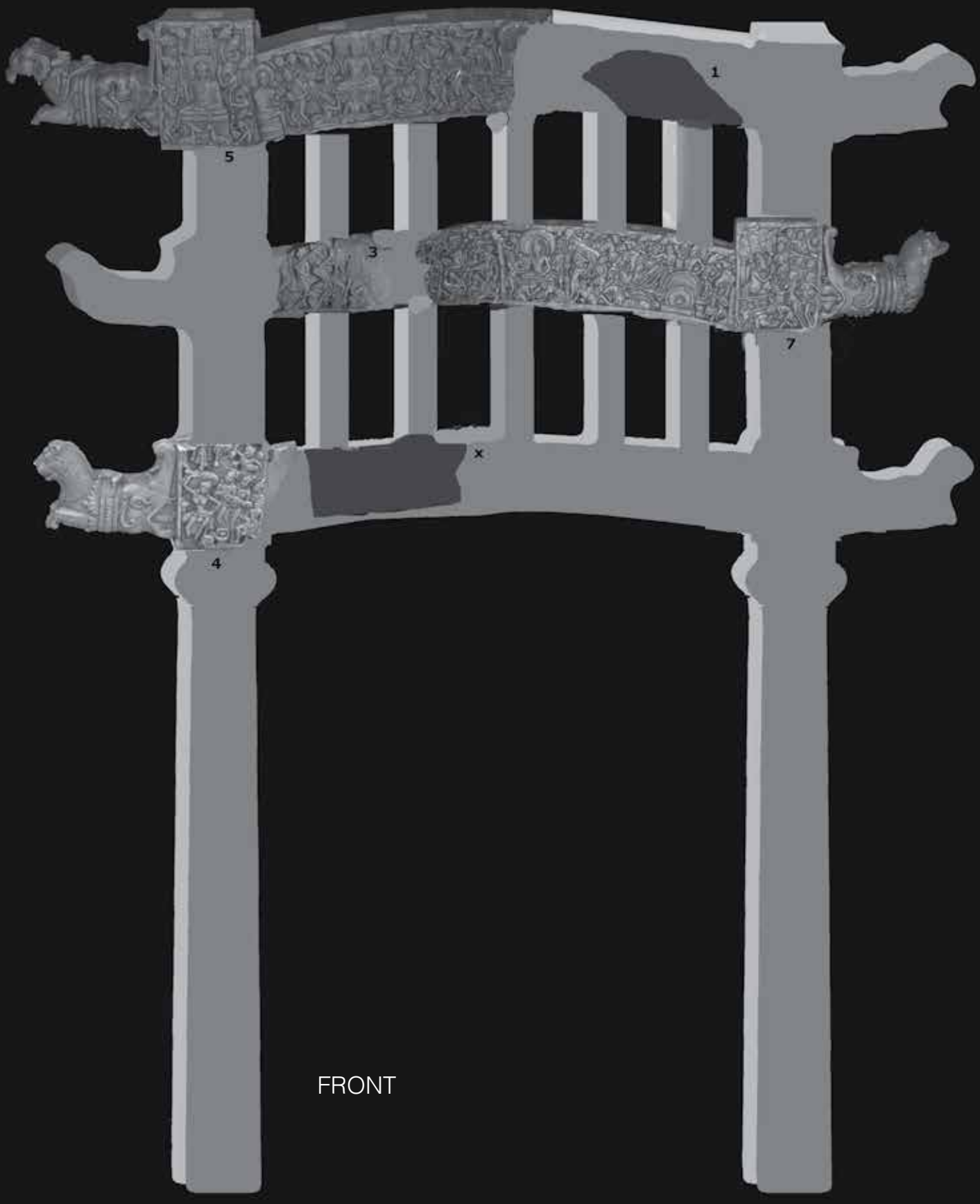
C

D

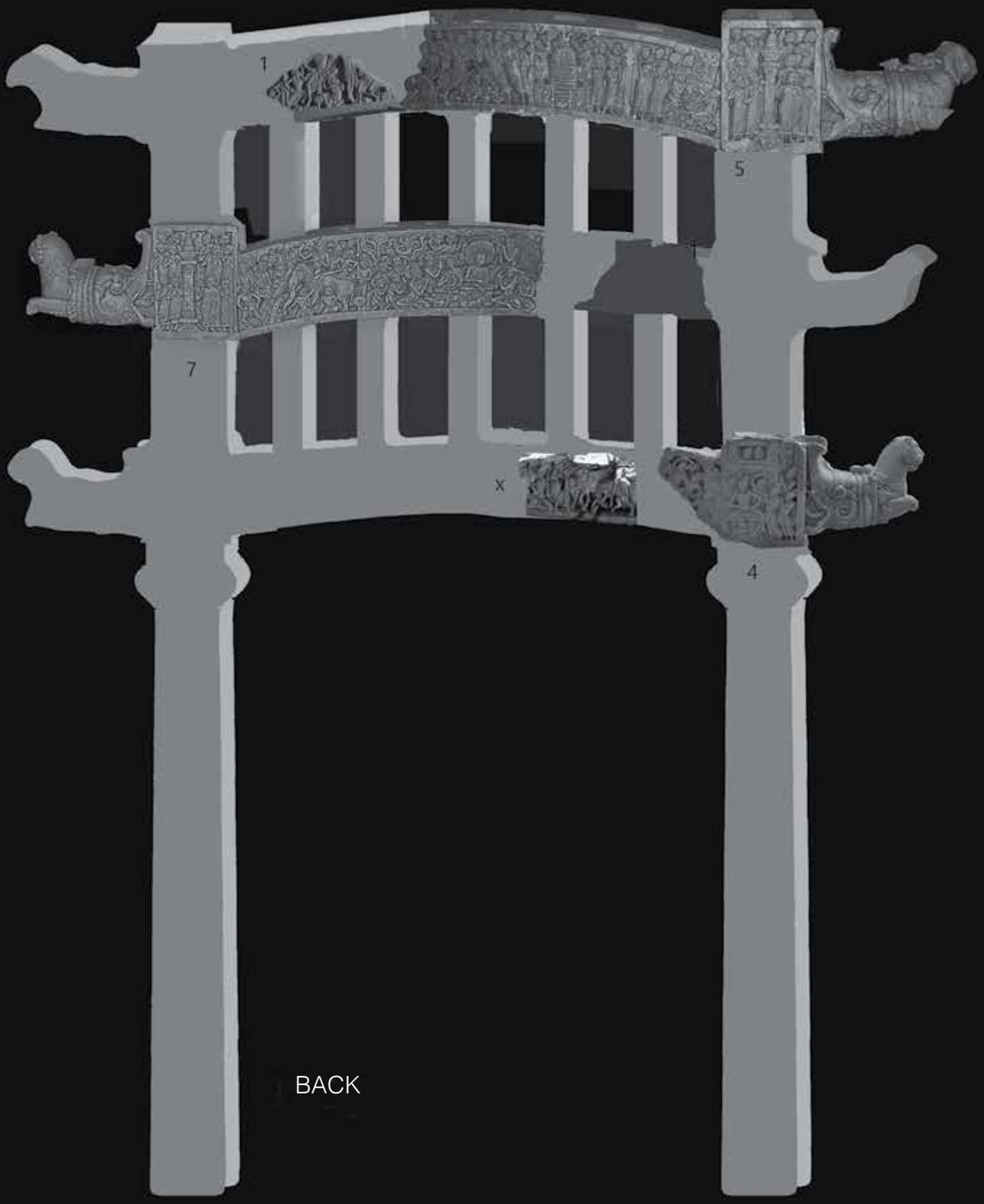
housed in the Baudhasree Museum, Guntur (see figure 6.5) and those seen in the Buddhist art of Nagarjunakonda (figure 6.4). Interestingly, at Nagarjunakonda too, it is located at the ends of a long panel carved with an ordered progression of scenes from the Buddha's biography. However, there, these composite creatures support shalabhanjikas; each episode is separated from the other by a mithuna couple and the whole is carved on a rectangular ayaka slab.[16] The front side of the die on architrave 4 at Phanigiri portrays Maya,[17] Siddhartha's mother, who holds the branch of a sal tree as her infant is born and received on a swaddle cloth by the four devas or deities. In the top right corner of the die, celebrations around the birth are portrayed. In iconography, style and composition the representation bears affinities to Ikshvaku-period art of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.[18]

A griffin-makara is located at the surviving terminal of architrave 7 (figure 6.14). This architrave spans a total length of 264 cm, of which the griffin-makara occupies 63 cm. A cuboid die (57 x 39 x 27 cm) connects the composite animal with the curved band which breaks off a little beyond the centre of the architrave. Its front side is sculpted with a continuous progression of the Buddha's life narratives, beginning on

Pages 162 and 167
6.8 and 6.9 Reconstruction of the front and rear sides of the Phanigiri torana, marking with numbers the placement of sculpted fragments. Reconstruction by Parul Pandya Dhar, with drawings by Sanjay Dhar.
© Parul Pandya Dhar.



FRONT


1
5
7
x
4
BACK

6.10 Fragment from the rear side of architrave 7 of the Phanigiri torana depicting salutation paid to monks, monks in confrontation with serpents, and a joyful procession. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

6.11 Fragment from the rear side of architrave 5 of the Phanigiri torana depicting the worship of nagas and chaitya stambhas, and a confrontation between monks and nagas. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

the cuboid die to the viewer's right. Shakyavardhana, the tutelary deity of the Shakya clan into which Siddhartha was born, is shown emerging from his tree-shrine. In recognition of the newborn's true nature, the deity offers obeisance to the bodhisatva who is represented emblematically by his footprints. Once again, the portrayal comes closest to a depiction from Nagarjunakonda (figure 6.7).[19] Especially noteworthy is the detailed attention lavished on the architecture of the tree-shrine at Phanigiri and Nagarjunakonda. The typical chandrashila (moonstone) at the base step leading to the shrine, the gavakshas (dormer arches) at the level of the kapota (eave cornice), the domical roof with a banner, the pillars and the garland of bells seem inspired by contemporaneous tree-shrines of the Ikshvaku period.

This is followed by an evocative portrayal of the bodhisatva as young Prince Siddhartha who sets out of his palace in a chariot and witnesses the three harsh realities of the human condition in the form of a sick, an aging and a dead person (figure 6.13). It is a strikingly original composition that does not have a close parallel in the portrayals of this theme at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.[20] The three sights occupy the farthest limit of this episode, represented by a sick man with gangly limbs and a swollen stomach, reclining on the ground, an aged man standing nearby in a suppliant gesture, and a corpse in a shroud surrounded by grieving relatives and friends located in the top register. Siddhartha is astride a horse-drawn chariot, engaged in deep conversation with his charioteer who appears to be explaining the sights to him.[21]

Following the three encounters, as per the sequence on the architrave, Siddhartha returned to his palace and contemplated the meaning of human life under a jambu (black plum) tree. After that, he withdrew himself from the pleasures of his harem, and planned his great departure from the palace in Kapilavastu (see figure 6.13). As Peter Skilling has discussed earlier, the placement of this episode of the prince's meditation under the jambu tree varies in different versions.[22] As the prince is seated in meditation, his father accompanied by the ladies of the harem appear to distract or persuade the prince (cf. figure 2.4). The next scene in succession shows a disinterested prince next to his wife and amidst a bevy of beautiful women in the interiors of his palatial chamber (cf. figure 2.4). Its iconography and style are well known through similar compositions from other Andhran sites. The architrave breaks off beyond this at the point where one observes a miniature torana carved in relief, marking the entrance to Prince Siddhartha's palatial chamber. As the next episode would expectedly be that of the great departure (mahabhinishkramana), the presence of the torana at the juncture that visually linked the two scenes may also be viewed as signifying an exit from the palace.[23] Unfortunately the remaining portion of the architrave has been damaged.

The available portion of architrave 5 spans a length of 267 cm, which includes a hasti-makara terminal (68 cm), a cuboid die (55 x 40 x 29 cm) and the curvilinear band of the architrave (170 cm) (figure 6.15). Proceeding from the right to left, the first scene is partially lost and represents the victory over Mara (Mara-vijaya).[24] It was conceived with the Buddha-to-be seated centrally, and Mara on an elephant with his army and his daughters organized around the seated figure.[25] The visual composition on the front face of the surviving half of architrave 5 suggests that it was perhaps composed of five representations of the bodhisatva or the Buddha seated cross-legged and flanked symmetrically by other figures related to the specific events depicted. Following Mara's assault and the Buddha's victory over Mara, the curved band of this architrave depicts the offering of bowls by the four

great kings and the first offering of food by the merchants, Trapusha and Bhallika (figure 6.16; cf. figure 2.2). The manner of depiction is reminiscent of a panel from Nagarjunakonda although the Buddha's stance vis-a-vis the kings and merchants has reversed in the two comparable compositions (figure 6.17).[26] The visualization of the Buddha's biography on the Phanigiri torana culminates in the turning of the wheel of Dharma (dharmachakra-pravartana) in the deer park (mrigadava), which is sculpted on the surviving die of architrave 5 (figure 6.18). The Buddha is seated cross-legged with his right hand in the gesture of preaching. The five ascetics, who had earlier advocated the extreme path to him, are to his left. Aesthetically, the serene expressions on the faces of the ascetics, their chaste hair knots and tapering beards are the highlight of this portrayal. Two deer at the level of the pedestal symbolize the deer park at Sarnath. A pillar of fire topped by the dharmachakra is located behind the Buddha, suggestive of enlightenment, juxtaposing his transformation from a bodhisatva to the Buddha with his first sermon.[27]

6.12 Terminal fragment from the front side of architrave 4 of the Phanigiri torana with a shardula-makara and a die depicting Siddhartha's birth. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

The continuous biographical narrative of the Buddha at Phanigiri does not proceed beyond his first sermon and is "incomplete" in the sense that it does not cover the entirety of the Buddha's life. As Vincent Tournier has discussed elsewhere, this coincides with a group of Buddhist textual traditions, the oldest among which have survived only in Chinese, that also terminate at the first sermon or soon after the Buddha's awakening, and could yield important clues to understand the development of the hagiographical tradition in South Asia.[28]

Only two of the smaller architrave fragments are numbered. Of these, fragment 3 (60 x 36 cm) is carved only on one side. It appears to have chipped and separated into two halves vertically; unfortunately, its rear side is no longer available. This is evident from the split rectangular socket visible on its lower edge (figure 6.20). The available fragment is carved with damaged parts of the narrative of Siddhartha's great departure and hence is in continuation with episodes portrayed on the front face of architrave 7. The hoofs of the horse Kanthaka are being received by devas rising from the ground, including an anthropomorphic naga, in anticipation of the horse's further steps. Two figures, one with a sword in hand and wearing a tunic, are visible. A figure who appears to be blocking Siddhartha's passage could be Mara, the tempter, who in some versions of the Buddha's biography is said to have obstructed the bodhisatva's path.[29]

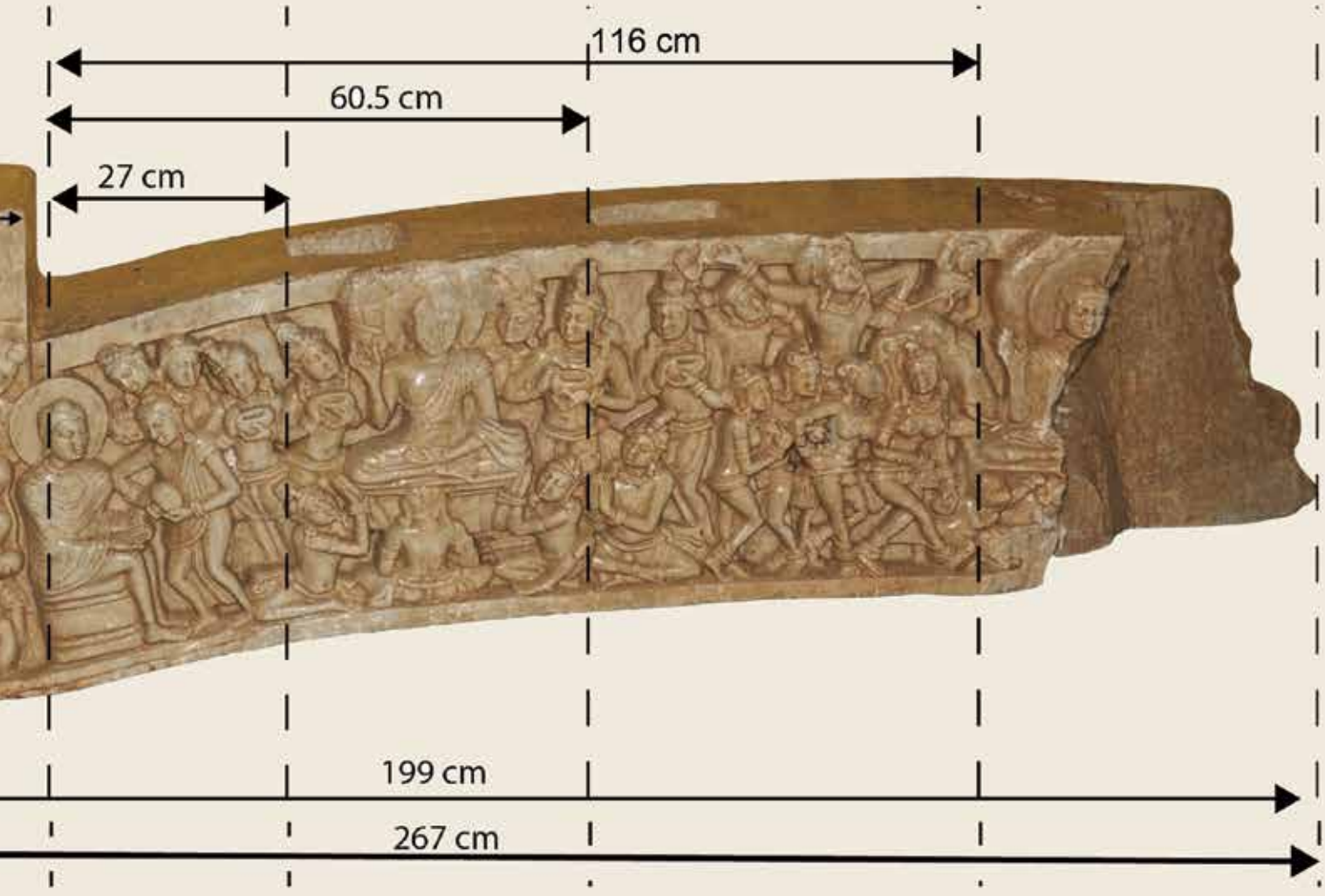
The second smaller piece is numbered as fragment 1 (65 x 31 cm) and, like fragment 3, is also carved only on one face (figure 6.21). It is not related to the Buddha's biographical narratives and is not of a piece with fragment 3. An unnumbered and much smaller broken part of another architrave terminal was found in the debris piled on the first floor of the site's storehouse (fragment Y, figure 6.19). This tiny fragment has a makara's curved snout attached to the broken part of a rectangular die which is carved with a portion of a narrative that is too fragmentary to identify with certainty. In form and measure, it fits perfectly as an architrave terminal.[30]

6.13 Fragment detail from the front side of architrave 7 of the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

6.14 Fragment from the front side of architrave 7 of the Phanigiri torana with a griffin-makara terminal and scenes depicting Shakyavardhana paying obeisance to the bodhisatva, Prince Siddhartha's three encounters, meditation under a jambu tree, and his night at the palace prior to his departure. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Modified image © Parul Pandya Dhar.

15 x 15 cm
19 cm
19 cm
27 cm
57 cm
63 cm
40 cm
39 cm
264 cm

6.15 and 6.16 Full fragment and detail of the front side of architrave 5 of the Phanigiri torana with a hasti-makara terminal and scenes depicting Mara-vijaya, offering of bowls by the four kings, and offering of food by the merchants Trapusha and Bhallika. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Modified figure 6.16 © Parul Pandya Dhar.


116 cm
60.5 cm
27 cm
199 cm
267 cm

6.17 Detail of a slab from Nagarjunakonda depicting offerings by the four kings and Trapusha and Bhallika. Courtesy Archaeological Museum, Nagarjunakonda. Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar.

6.18 The first sermon (dharmachakra-pravartana) in the deer park at Sarnath on the die of architrave 5 on the front side of the Phanigiri torana. Photograph: Naman P. Ahuja.

It most likely would have portrayed an assembly with a central figure flanked by chauri-bearers. The carving on the other side is not available.

RECONSTRUCTION: CONFIGURING THE ARCHITRAVES AND SMALLER FRAGMENTS

Based on a close interpretation of measurements and narrative configuration of the architraves and fragments, my reconstruction of the Phanigiri torana reveals that it had three architraves, each with a different composite animal motif at its ends—shardula-makara (bottom, architrave 4), griffin-makara (middle, architrave 7) and hasti-makara (top, architrave 5) (figures 6.8 and 6.9). After careful consideration, the possibility of this being a torana with only two (and not three) architraves is rejected. First, the aesthetics of compositional symmetry and balance followed by the artists at Phanigiri[31] and elsewhere in the Andhra region makes the presence of differing composite animal motifs at two ends of the same architrave very unlikely. Second, when architectural design, proportion and the development of sculptural narrative on the architraves are correlated and comprehensively assessed, it becomes evident that the progression of the Buddha's life events on the front faces of the architraves began with birth-related episodes and culminated in the Buddha's first sermon. Such a well-defined narrative structure can only be coherently configured in a space provided by three architraves. Third, as observed on architrave fragment X, the curvilinear band of the bottom architrave had an ornamental design carved on its

6.19 Damaged makara terminal and die (fragment Y) found in the debris. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: Naman P. Ahuja.

6.20 A portion of the great departure scene depicted on fragment 3 from the front side of architrave 7 of the Phanigiri torana. Note the split socket at the back. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photographs: Parul Pandya Dhar.

underside, which is absent in architrave 5 (top architrave) and architrave 7 (middle architrave). This clearly suggests a torana with three architraves.

The visualization of the Buddha's life narratives on the Phanigiri torana architraves is interrupted only on account of the lost or missing fragments that are not available to us. This has caused an absence of those life events that would have occupied the space on the missing portions of architraves 4, 7 and 5.[32] By comparing the portrayals of the Buddha's biographical episodes at other early Buddhist sites in Andhra, especially at Nagarjunakonda and the final phase at Amaravati, it is possible to conjecture the lost visual narrations that would likely have been included on the Phanigiri torana.[33]

In case of fragment Y with the much-damaged makara terminal and die, two possibilities deserve careful consideration. It may have belonged to the front side of the bottom architrave with the narrative of the bodhisatva in Tushita heaven which

6.21 Fragment 1 from the rear side of architrave 5 of the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar.

was depicted in Ikshvaku-period art as an assembly with a seated bodhisatva flanked by chauri-bearers (see figure 6.8). This possibility fits the reconstructed biographical narrative sequence on the front side very well. However, given the limited evidence, this remains a hypothesis. Alternatively, it may have belonged to the middle architrave on the rear side, depicting a seated royal flanked by chauri-bearers similar to but not identical with the depiction of the royal figure and chauri-bearers on the die of architrave 4 on the rear side (see figure 6.9). This too is, at best, a conjecture.

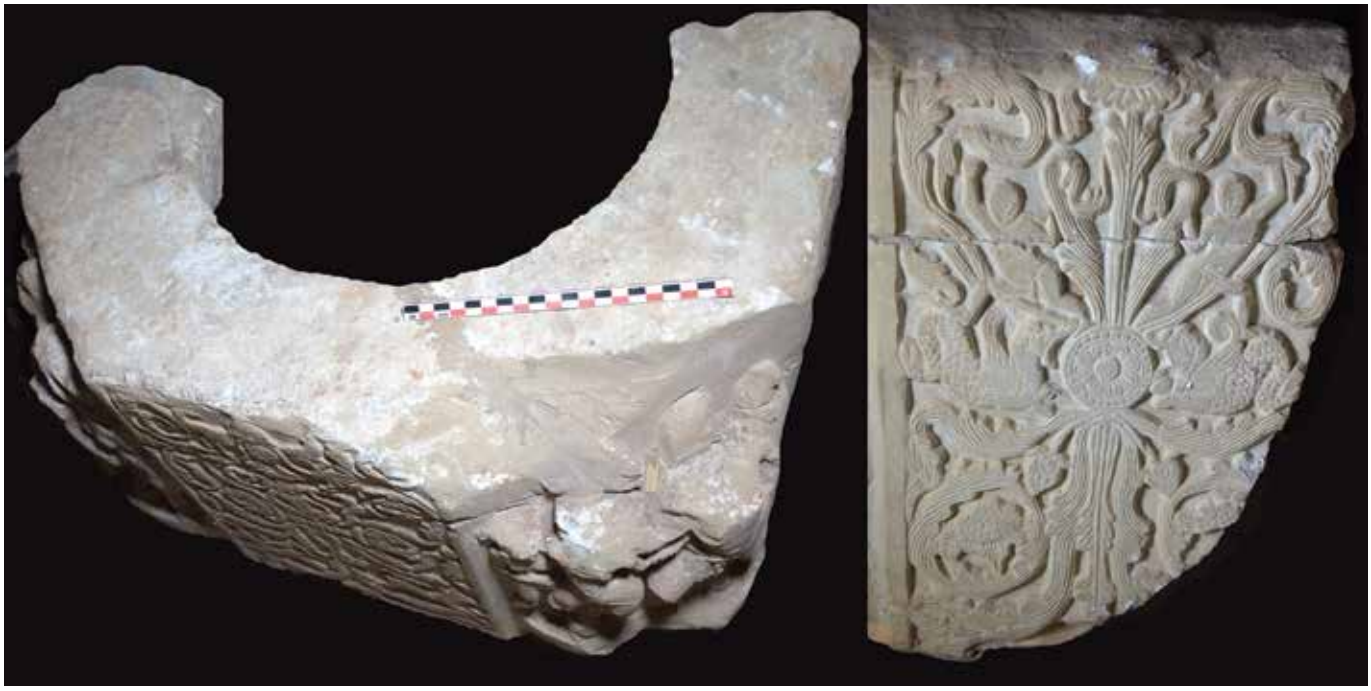
The Buddha's biography unfolds systematically and sequentially, from the right to left on each of the three architraves, with episodes moving from events surrounding the bodhisatva's birth to the Buddha's enlightenment and his first sermon at the deer park in Sarnath. The bottom architrave would have begun with pre-birth narratives including the bodhisatva in Tushita heaven; the descent of the white elephant; Maya's dream and the interpretation of the dream, culminating in the birth of Siddhartha on the surviving die of architrave 4.[34]

The biographical narrative continues uninterruptedly on architrave 7 (middle architrave), portraying from right to left: salutation to the newborn bodhisatva by Shakyavardhana, the Shakya tutelary deity; Siddhartha's three encounters (with old age, disease and death), his meditation under a jambu tree, and his final night in the palace prior to the great departure. Fragment 3, which depicts portions of the scene of the great departure,[35] would have been of a piece with architrave 7, as it is the next episode in the progression of the Buddha's life as depicted in the Andhra idiom.

With some missing links,[36] the biography progresses from the viewer's right and moves leftwards on the front face of architrave 5 (top architrave), visualizing Mara-vijaya, the offering of bowls by the four kings, and then the offerings by the merchants Trapusha and Bhallika to the Buddha. The visual biography on the Phanigiri torana ends with the Buddha's dharmachakra-pravartana on the surviving die of the top architrave. Based on evidence from the biographical narrative prevalent

at Nagarjunakonda[37] with which the Phanigiri narrative has the closest affinities, the missing halves of architraves 5 and 7 would in all likelihood have included: the missing portions of Siddhartha's great departure; Chhandaka conveying the news of Siddhartha's departure in Shuddhodana's court; Siddhartha giving up his princely robes, jewels and turban; shearing of Siddhartha's hair; transportation of the turban; and Sujata offering payasa (a rice and milk preparation) to Siddhartha prior to his meditation under the bodhi tree at Bodhgaya.[38]

Pillars: The available remains of the Phanigiri torana reveal that it was c. 7 to 8 m tall and a little more than c. 4 m wide, with the central arc of each architrave covering a span of c. 3 m between the pillars.[39] This would have been in proportion to the Phanigiri mahastupa, which has an outer diameter of c. 18 m (c. 20 m with the ayakas). From among the available pillar fragments, of special note is an octagonal inscribed pillar which records the dedication of a dharmachakra stambha by the chief physician of the Ikshvaku king Rudrapurushadatta in the 18th regnal year (c. 290/300 to 315/25 AD).[40] It is stark and unpretentious, rather plain, with the inscribed text as its sole highlight and is unlikely to have supported the ornate torana architraves. An exquisitely carved pillar capital with a projecting tenon has also been found (figure 6.23).[41] It is made up of a hollow octagonal member, richly carved with mithuna couples alternating with a delicately rendered scroll peopled with other motifs. This is topped by two circular discs, the smaller lower one bearing an undulating scroll and the larger cushion-shaped circular disc bearing auspicious Buddhist symbols including a dharmachakra, a serpent and a vase among others (cf. figures 2.10–2.14).[42] Vincent Tournier has documented fragments of a comparable capital belonging to Tirumalagiri (16 km from Phanigiri), currently housed in the storage of the Visakhapatnam Naval Museum (figure 6.22).[43] It is difficult to say if they were originally from Phanigiri but if they were, they may have been part of the torana's pillar-capital. However, it is equally probable that they may have supported chaitya stambhas, or, as John Guy has noted earlier in this volume, it could be the remains



6.22 Pillar capital fragments from Tirumalagiri. Courtesy Visakhapatnam Naval Museum. Photograph: Vincent Tournier.

of a yashti pillar on the mahastupa. Given the limited evidence, it is not possible to predict this with any degree of certainty.

6.23 Pillar capital with tenon from Phanigiri. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana. Photograph: Parul Pandya Dhar.

OF BUDDHIST MONKS, KINGS, SERPENTS AND SYMBOLS

Intriguing visual narratives with no known parallels in the early Buddhist art of Andhra occupy the rear side of the architraves (figures 6.9–6.11 and 6.24–6.25). As we now know, the front side of the architraves were visualized as a continuous progression of the Buddha's biography and could therefore be reconstructed comprehensively by correlating the missing portions with parallel depictions of the biography from sites such as Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. Such a recourse is, however, not possible for reading the rear-side narratives. Any attempt to fill in the missing links for interpreting the narrative content on the rear side is thus fraught with difficulties. However, a reconstruction of the torana architraves based on its measure, proportion and the logic of narratives on its front side is helpful when interpreting imagery on the rear side as well, because it already configures the available visual phrases on the rear side within the architectural frame of the torana, giving us a greater sense of the intended episodic progression on the rear side.

The surviving die of the lowest architrave (4) bears on its rear side a royal figure seated on a stool in a thoughtful posture, flanked by two chauri-bearers (see figure 6.24). Three men stand before him in anjali hasta (hands joined in salutation) as though entreating or requesting him. A couple witness the scene from a balcony above and two dwarf figures are placed underneath the stool on which the royal figure is seated. The architectural frame that gives this scene its setting is most likely a part of a palace. This connects with a gateway carved on the fragmentary portion of the curved band of the architrave. Unfortunately, too little survives of the arched band but what remains is sufficient to see the royal figure departing from the palace, attended by a chauri-bearer and a man holding the stem of what is perhaps a parasol. This is an important detail to which we shall return later. Standing behind this group is a priestly figure with a hair knot.

An unnumbered broken piece, fragment X, also belongs to the lowermost architrave as is clear by the presence of a carved ornamental design on its underside.[44] It reveals part of a procession and seated figures in anjali hasta, as is evident from Peter Skilling's photograph of 2005 (figure 6.25, right).[45] It was no longer intact during my site visits in 2017 and 2018, but I was able to locate and photograph a severed and further damaged part of this larger unnumbered piece lying in the debris (fragment X, figure 6.25, left). We thus have documented evidence of its slow dismemberment during the passage of 12 years.

The next set of narratives available to us are located on the middle architrave (7) (see figure 6.10). At the centre are two monks, of whom the one seated on a higher platform and under a tree seems to be the senior monk whose attention is engaged by a couple to his left (cf. figure 2.1). The couple is seated cross-legged with their hands joined in salutation and the male sports a very peculiar and elaborate headgear. Two partially effaced figures in anjali hasta are standing in the background above the seated couple. On the monk's pedestal is a beautiful horned deer that evokes the symbolism of the Buddha's first sermon in the deer park in Sarnath, but its purpose here is difficult to tell except that here too, the monk is engaged in

6.24 Fragment with shardula-makara and die on the rear side of architrave 4 of the Phanigiri torana. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

giving a sermon. A flask each is placed near the pedestals of both monks. Two exalted men (devas?) with haloes, turbans and jewels, pay respect to the monks and are seated to the right of the junior monk. Three female serpents accompanied by a male serpent, all of them distinguished by their serpent hoods, are seated behind the two men. All of them have their hands respectfully held in anjali hasta. Unusually, the female serpents outnumber their male counterparts. Could the intriguing scene in the background offer an explanation to this unusual portrayal? Two serpents, one of whom is multi-cephalous, are seen in confrontation with two monks in the background. It is possible that the two serpents in the background are related to the anthropomorphic serpent group seated in the foreground. In line with established norms of continuous narrations in early Indian sculpture, it is also very likely that the two standing monks confronting the two serpents in the background depict the same monks who are seated in the foreground. A peacock, deer and the trees flanking the scene—all seem to suggest a natural, open-air setting. The rock-like formations near the tails of the serpents convey that the location for the events in the background is perhaps a hillock. The visual pun on the name "Phanigiri" is difficult to miss, but this was perhaps not the name by which the monastic complex may have been known in ancient times.[46]

Further to the viewer's left on the middle architrave, a royal figure is seated on an elephant with two attendants—a chauri-bearer and a parasol-bearer. The composition is very similar to the damaged representation on the arched band of the lowest architrave (4) (see figure 6.24). This, most likely, is the same group represented again. On the middle architrave, the royal figure on the elephant is accompanied by a horse-rider, who also appears to be a person of eminence. The two could be the same as the turbaned men seated next to the junior monk but the absence of haloes in the case of the riders renders such an interpretation doubtful. The procession with elephant, horse and riders is busy and full of gaiety—banners held up by attendants, a drummer, a person blowing a conch, and several other figures with shields and swords. The procession leads to a scene of adoration of a chaitya stambha by a congregation of twelve monks making floral offerings. The chaitya is shaped as a stupa in this case with an intriguing pillarette at its apex.[47]

The imagery on the uppermost architrave (5) begins on its surviving die with another depiction of the adoration of a chaitya stambha by a group of monks, very similar to the one on the middle architrave (see figure 6.11). The chaitya in this case has a chhatra crowning the projecting pillarette on top, which reveals the artist's intention on the die of the middle architrave as well, where it was left uncarved due to shortage of space. The next scene on the upper architrave depicts the sanctuary of a naga close to a waterbody, with worshippers making offerings. This sanctuary of a serpent is flanked yet again by a somewhat effaced and diminutive chaitya stambha, which appears for a third time on the rear side of the architraves.[48] The chaitya stambhas shaped as stupa chaityas appear thrice, perhaps representing a repetitive occurrence of the coming together of monks to worship the Buddha and

his relics and to propagate his teachings. The next scene depicting a stupa being worshipped by followers suggests yet again the importance of relics in Buddhist practice subsequent to Buddha's parinirvana (final emancipation).

The next visual composition on the topmost architrave is a dynamic portrayal of monks emerging out of the waters. A naga couple is seen in the waters in an attitude of reverence towards the monks (cf. figure 2.22). Thirteen monks are visible, same as the number of monks clustered around the chaitya stambha on this architrave.[49] The scene appears to suggest a confrontation between monks and serpents, a theme that also appears more than once on the rear-side architraves. Beyond this, only a small broken piece (fragment 1) is available (see figure 6.21). It depicts a dwarf figure and five other damaged figures, of which one seems to be that of a monk, in the attitude of flying or levitating. Ridged rocks sculpted at the bottom suggest a hillock.

An interpretation of the above narrative offered by Monika Zin, based on a textual description in the Sri Lankan *Mahavamsa* (c. 5th century AD), may have a bearing on the visualization of the top architrave (5). This textual passage discusses the manner by which the Buddha's bodily relics were obtained on the request of the king, by a monk named Sonuttara, from the nagas taking care of these in the Ramagrama stupa, for relocation to the great stupa of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka.[50] Zin's identification of this episode and its unprecedented elaboration on the Phanigiri torana is of interest because it draws attention to a possible link of Phanigiri with the *Mahavamsa*. The problem, however, is that Zin reads this episode as being the *only* narrative pervading the entire rear-side architraves and imagines it on a torana of two (and not three) architraves. Given the presence and specific arrangement of three torana architraves as per my reconstruction, the narrative sequence discussed by Zin would proceed from the top architrave to the bottom architrave, and then, after several missing links, connect with the middle architrave.[51] This renders the visual sequence on the rear side of the Phanigiri torana quite disorganized![52] While the Sonuttara episode may have been depicted on the top architrave, this does not necessarily translate as the only episode spread across all the three rear-side architraves.

The intrigue surrounding the visual narratives on the rear-side torana architraves will undoubtedly continue to engage art historians and Buddhologists for a while

6.25 Fragment X from the rear side of architrave 4 of the Phanigiri torana. Photograph on the right: Courtesy Peter Skilling. Photograph on the left: Parul Pandya Dhar; Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

longer. A close reading of visual detail does, however, yield important insights into their intended rationale. It foregrounds the role of royalty and the Buddhist sangha in negotiating a dominant space for Buddhism through their interactions with prevalent popular beliefs such as the worship of nagas. It also highlights the organization of congregations of monks and the spread of Buddhist thought and religion through practices such as the worship of the Buddha and his relics, and the building of stupas and chaityas.

The Phanigiri torana, reconstructed from its ruins, is unique not only for being the only surviving torana of its type in the architectural history of early southern India. It is also an aesthetically significant monument that aptly symbolizes the intended function of a torana as a marker of liminal space. On its front, viewers would have encountered a continuous narration, beginning with events surrounding the nascence of Siddhartha and culminating in his first sermon after becoming the Buddha. Filled with this imagery of the Buddha's earthly life, they would have entered through the torana and crossed over to its other side where they would have witnessed events that occurred after the Buddha's final emancipation from earthly life and the legacy of his teachings. The Phanigiri torana thereby marked both a physical and a metaphorical transformative experience for all those who visited the mahastupa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Department of Heritage Telangana, especially N.R. Visalatchy, for facilitating my work; Sanjay Dhar for preparing the crucial reconstruction drawings; Naman Ahuja, John Guy, Peter Skilling and Vincent Tournier for sharing photographs; and Raghunath Akarsh, Urvi Dhar and Ajeya Vajpayee for their help. My deepest gratitude is to my parents, Jyoti and Arun Pandya, for their inspiration and unwavering support until the end. Phanigiri will remain deeply associated with them in my memory.

ENDNOTES

1 B. Subrahmanyam, J. Vijaya Kumar, G.V. Ramakrishna Rao and K.S.B. Kesava, *Phanigiri: A Buddhist Site in Andhra Pradesh, An Interim Report, 2001–07*, Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2008.

2 Ibid., pp. 7–8, 16–18.

3 Ibid., p. 24.

4 Peter Skilling published the biographical narratives on the torana architraves in 2008. However, a detailed narrative progression and architectural reconstruction of the torana was first offered by the present author in 2019. See Peter Skilling, "New Discoveries from South India: The Life of the Buddha at Phanigiri, Andhra Pradesh", *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2008), pp. 96–118 and Parul Pandya Dhar, "Piecing a Puzzle: A Unique Toraṇa from Phanigiri, Telangana", *Proceedings of the Second International Seminar, "Telangana through Ages: Perspectives from Ancient and Medieval Periods", January 19–20, 2018*, edited by Shrikant Ganvir, Hemant Dalavi and Harshada Wirkud, Hyderabad: Department of Heritage Telangana, 2019, pp. 48–62.

5 See Parul Pandya Dhar, *The Toraṇa in Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2010, pp. 7–26.

6 Although pillars and fragments found from some Andhra sites have at times been referred to as "torana pillar" and "torana architrave", such identifications

have never been adequately substantiated. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Buddhist Sculpture: Recent Acquisitions", *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, Vol. XX, No. 22, (1922), pp. 45–53; James Burgess, *The Buddhist Stupas of Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta of the Krishna District, Madras Presidency, Surveyed in 1882*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1996 [1986], pl. XXXI, fig. 2.

7 Elizabeth Rosen Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994, fig. 173.

8 See J. Ph. Vogel, "Prakrit Inscriptions from Ghaṇṭasālā", *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 27 (1947–48), pp. 1–4. For updated readings, see S. Baums, A. Griffiths, I. Strauch and V. Tournier, "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa: Results of Field Work in January and February 2016", *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol.102 (2016), pp. 355–98. Also see, *Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa* (EIAD) 97 and 98, http://hisoma.huma-num.fr/exist/apps/EIAD/index2.html: "Success! In the estate of Ukhasiri, the notable (*gahapati*) Budhisiri, son of Dhaṁmavāniya, resident of *Kaṁṭakasala*, caused to be made this stone *maṇḍapa*, together with a *gandhakuṭī*, a railing (*vedikā*), and a portal (*toraṇa*)."

9 Dhar, *The Toraṇa in Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture*, D.1 and fig. 1.19 on p. 16.

10 Ibid., pp. 7–26 and fig. 1.26; Robert Knox, *Amaravati: Buddhist Architecture from the Great Stūpa*, London: British Museum Press, 1992, p. 157, Cat. 83.

11 Knox, *Amaravati*, pp. 23–30 and pp. 130–55, Cat. 68–80.

12 Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, pp. 7–8, 16–18. Skilling, "New Discoveries", pp. 99–102, figs. 8–10.

13 The photograph was taken by Peter Skilling in 2005 and is published in Monika Zin, "The Buddha's Relics and the Nāgas: An Attempt to Throw Light on Some Depictions in the Amaravati School", in *South Asian Archaeology and Art 2012*, Vol. 2, edited by V. Lefèvre, A. Didier and B. Mutin, Turnhout: Brepols, 2016, figs. 9 and 10.

14 Hasti refers to the elephant; a griffin is a mythical creature with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

15 The issue of textual correspondences to the visual biography of the Buddha at Phanigiri or even at other places in the Andhra region is a vexed one. See Skilling, "New Discoveries", 2008; Vincent Tournier, "Śākyamuni: South Asia", in *Brill Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Vol. II: Lives*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019, pp. 3–38.

16 Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 158; P.R. Ramachandra Rao, *The Art of Nagarjunakonda*, Madras: Rachana, 1956, pp. 106–07, pl. XXXVI.

17 The octagonal pillar inscription at Phanigiri interestingly refers to Maya as the mother of the bodhisatva in a verse which is most likely intended as a double entendre. See EIAD 104.

18 For similar depictions from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, see Knox, *Amaravati*, pp. 100–01, no. 41 and p. 121, no. 61; Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 188.

19 Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 188, top left.

20 See figure 224 in Stone's book for a depiction from Nagarjunakonda of Siddhartha's encounter with a corpse.

21 Skilling, "New Discoveries", pp. 103–04, for textual correlations with Ashvaghosha's *Buddhacharita* and Chinese sources.

22 Ibid., pp. 103–05.

23 As is well-known, a torana is often indicated as part of the scene of the great departure in early Buddhist art. See Dhar, *The Toraṇa in Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture*, pp. 15–19, figs. 1.17, 1.18, 1.25 and 1.26.

24 Skilling, "New Discoveries", 2008, pp. 107–10 for a very useful discussion on these narratives. Skilling, however, mistakes the biographical narratives to have been carved on two sides of the same torana architrave.

25 See Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 228, bottom panel, for a comparable portrayal from Nagarjunakonda.

26 Ibid., fig. 229; Skilling, "New Discoveries", pp. 108–09.

27 For a similar pillar of flame, see Knox, *Amaravati*, p. 86, Cat. 28, inner face.

28 Tournier, "Śākyamuni: South Asia", pp. 23–38.

29 Skilling, "New Discoveries", pp. 105–06, fig. 16.

30 The surviving portion of the makara's snout measures c. 15 cm in length. The fragment is c. 27 cm at its widest extent. I am grateful to Raghunath Akarsh for these measurements.

31 See, for example, the turban pillar from Phanigiri in Naman Ahuja's concluding chapter in this book and in Subrahmanyam et al., *Interim Report*, p. 36, with makaras releasing rampant lions from their jaws just under the turban-shaped top.

32 The Phanigiri torana is unique in its uninterrupted portrayal of the Buddha's biographical narrative across three architraves on its front side. At the Sanchi mahastupa, select episodes from the Buddha's biography are represented quite differently on the torana architraves. A single event such as the great departure (mahabhinishkramana) or victory over Mara (Mara-vijaya) occupies an entire architrave at Sanchi but there is no attempt at a sequential rendition from birth to enlightenment as at Phanigiri.

33 See Akira Shimada, "Formation of Andhran Buddhist Narrative: A Preliminary Survey", *Buddhist Narrative in Asia and Beyond*, Vol. 1, edited by Peter Skilling and Justin McDaniel, Bangkok: Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2012, pp. 17–34.

34 For images of these themes from Nagarjunakonda, see Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, figs. 41, 65, 83 and 84 (Maya's dream), fig. 192 (bodhisatva in Tushita heaven and descent of white elephant) and fig. 65 (interpretation of the dream). See also, Knox, *Amaravati*, p. 121, no. 61 and Rao, *The Art of Nagarjunakonda,* p. 123, pl. XLIV for similar examples of episodes leading up to the bodhisatva's birth.

35 The great departure carved on the vertical "turban piece" recovered from Phanigiri gives us a sense of what its animated visualization may have looked like on the torana architrave as well. See Naman Ahuja's concluding chapter in this book.

36 Unfortunately, the front face of fragment 1 is unavailable.

37 Shimada, "Formation of Andhran Buddhist Narrative", pp. 17–34.

38 For parallels from Nagarjunakonda, see Rao, *The Art of Nagarjunakonda*, pp. 124–29, pls. XLV–XLVII (Siddhartha gives away his clothes and jewels; transportation of Siddhartha's turban to heaven; Chhandaka relates Siddhartha's departure in Shuddhodana's court). Also, Stone, *The Buddhist Art of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa*, fig. 225.

39 These measurements are based on the actual measured dimensions of the available parts of architraves as indicated in fragments 3, 4 and 5, the curve of the central arc, and the ways in which the narrative of the Buddha's biography develops on the front face of the torana architraves. The height of the supporting pillars up to the lower edge of the lowest architrave is assumed to be at least 350–400 cm.

40 See Baums et al., "Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa", pp. 369–77. It measures c. 350 cm, including the cushion-shaped capital and the projecting tenon.

41 John Guy, in his chapter in this book, has discussed this same fragment as

a yashti pillar fragment, leaving the object still open to interpretation.

42 The surviving portion is c. 105 cm (excluding the tenon) and the outer diameter of the larger disc is c. 70 cm. A solid inner core ran through the entire capital.

43 Acc. No. 80-45/1. See Vincent Tournier, "Buddhist Lineages along the Southern Routes: On Two *Nikāyas* Active at Kanaganahalli under the Sātavāhanas", in *Ratnavaṃśapradīpikā: Indian, Tibetan, and Buddhist Studies in Honour of Cristina Scherrer-Schaub*, edited by V. Eltschinger, M. Sernesi and V. Tournier, Naples: Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale, 2020, p. 8 and notes 23 and 24.

44 This is because the upper and middle architraves of the torana would be connected to the successively lower architraves by means of small uprights and tenons. Only the arc of the lowermost architrave would be visible uninterrupted when viewed from below. One notices a similar organization in the case of the Sanchi stupa torana architraves.

45 Zin, "The Buddha's Relics and the Nāgas", fig. 9b.

46 See EIAD 117 which mentions the name of the Phanigiri monastic complex as "karimahaviha//(r)".

47 Such a chaitya stambha was most likely part of the actual monastic complex at Phanigiri as remains of two stepped bases, similar to the type depicted on the torana, have survived among the archaeological remains.

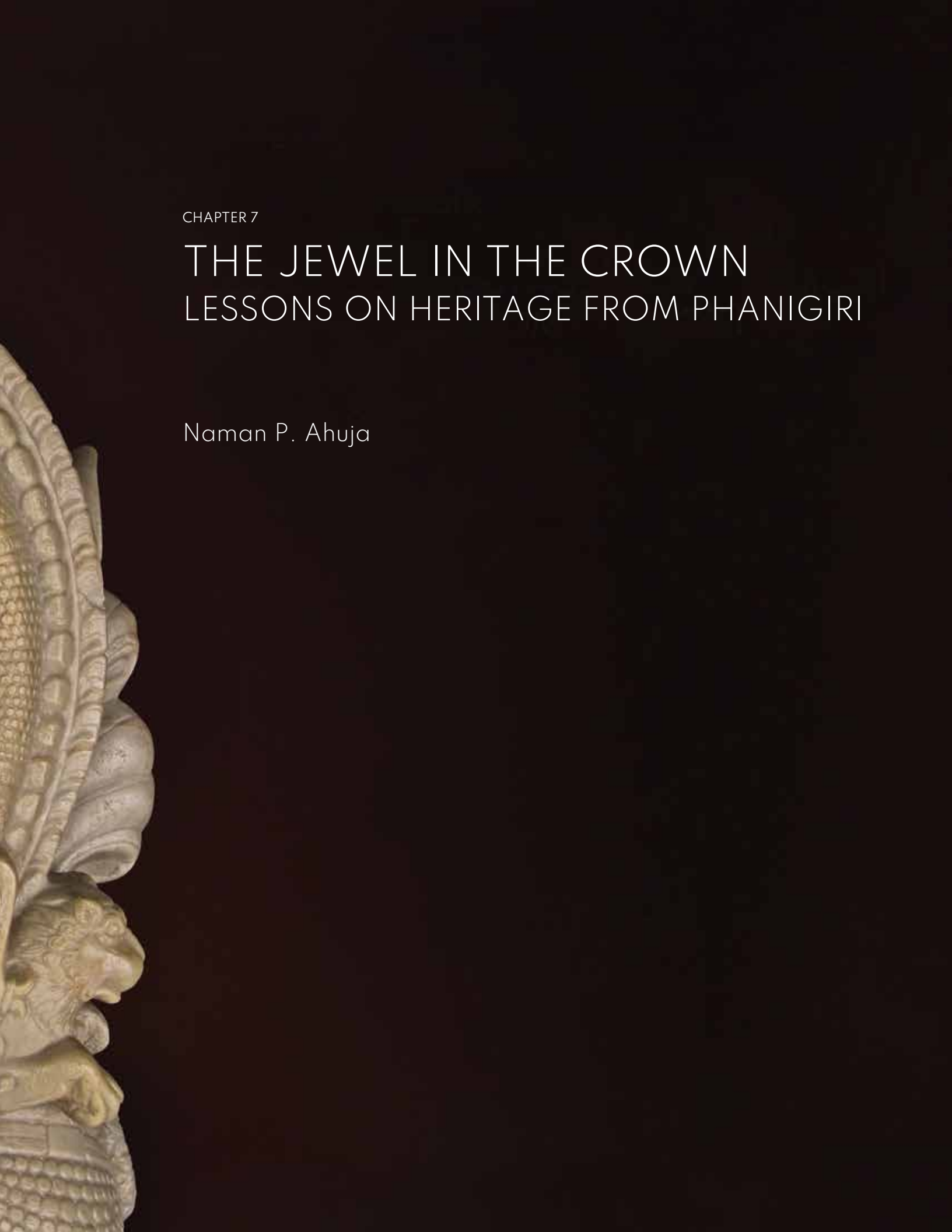
48 The projecting pillarette at its top is a clear indication that this could not have been a dharmachakra stambha.

49 This may be a coincidence but is an interesting detail. On the die of the middle architrave, one notices twelve monks.

50 Zin, "The Buddha's Relics and the Nāgas", pp. 757–76. In brief, the story relates to the swallowing of relics by naga Vasuladatta, a nephew of the serpent-king Kalanaga, from whose custody monk Sonuttara set out to acquire the relics. Vasuladatta coiled himself around a mountain but was discovered by Sonuttara, who managed to extract the relics from the former and fly off with them. See also, Catherine Becker, "Mahinda's visit to Amaravati? Narrative Connections between Buddhist Communities in Andhra and Sri Lanka", in *Amaravati: The Art of an Early Buddhist Monument in Context*, edited by Akira Shimada and Michael Willis, London: British Museum Press, 2016, pp. 70–78.

51 Following Zin's reading, the story begins on the rear side at the top (architrave 5) of our reconstructed torana, from the viewer's right (figure 6.9), "where we find the sanctuary of a *nāga*, placed between two reliquaries, not far from a *stūpa.* Further to the left, monks are shown flying away from the water reservoir, perhaps carrying the relics away from the abode of the *nāgas*?" (see note 49 here). The second part of this story, in Zin's view, continues on the broken parts of the other architrave (4 and X, rear side), which "shows, on the right, the king in the palace, and, on the left, his departure from the city towards the preaching monk."

52 If we hypothesize fragments X and 3 to be two faces of the same fragment, and architraves 4 and 7 as well as fragment X to form a single architrave, we face an even greater challenge. In this case, the Buddha's biographical narrative on the front face loses its calibrated and continuous flow. The scene of the great departure, for example, would then lead to the birth scene and there would be considerable limitations of space on that architrave!



CHAPTER 7

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN
LESSONS ON HERITAGE FROM PHANIGIRI

Naman P. Ahuja

A jewel of a sculpture, often called the "turban relief of Phanigiri", is remarkable for its quality of carving, clarity of composition, and the deeply symbolic story it has to tell. The first half of this essay attempts to provide a context for how that sculpture was seen, by whom it was seen, and how such an image might have resonated with its viewers in ancient times. The second half looks at how today's public and media have responded to it, the metaphors it holds for present times, and the lessons we can learn as we plan ahead for the management of heritage in Phanigiri.

*

In the familiar story from the Buddha's life, usually called "the great departure", prince Siddhartha did not just leave behind a luxurious home, family and comfort; he also cast away what he wore and tossed away his turban. This is the tale that the sculpture narrates (figure 7.2). A turban is a symbol of lineage, caste, region and inheritance that is often wound around boys' heads after they attain puberty and in investiture ceremonies when men become the heads of their families.[1] Throwing away his turban, then, was Siddhartha's grand public gesture of casting off the ties that bound him to his identity, inheritance and previous life. The stele shows this in two panels, but its third crowning element is shaped into an unusual three-dimensional sculpture of a turban—the turban that Siddhartha forsook as a symbol of giving up material wealth and temporal power.

We need to consider the etymology of a few words and their enduring symbolic power to really appreciate the significance of this sculpture at this site. The word used in art history and by artists when they refer to the uppermost portion of a Buddhist railing sculpture or free-standing pillar is "ushnisha". This is a multivalent Sanskrit word which means "turban" or "crown" and is also used to refer to the "cranial protuberance" of the Buddha. The idea of the crowning element can also be found in the name of Phanigiri, derived from the word "phana" meaning "serpent's hood".[2] That too is significant, for after all, it is a commonly held belief that the mani (or jewel) is kept in the serpent's phana (or crest). The common word in most modern Indian languages for a turban is "pagri/paagri", or even "faagri" in some eastern Indian languages (like Sylheti). And although pagri may seem close to Phanigiri phonetically, given the strong phonetic integrity of *ṇ* in Phanigiri, a connection with pagri is unlikely. Nonetheless, it is worth keeping the words "ushnisha" and "pagri" in mind, whether it be in colloquial language, in folklore, or in classical Sanskrit, to grasp how the metaphors of a turban and crowning were powerfully embedded in the sculpture.

Royal turbans and crowns are adorned with a jewel. The Kohinoor, for instance, formed the jewel in the British crown, or India itself was widely called the "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire. What then is the jewel in the crown of Phanigiri? It is a circular medallion in the middle of the turban's front, which is carved with a group of euphoric people carrying a turban on a salver or tray, creating what looks like a scene of a small turban in a big turban! (figure 7.1) Is this just repetition? Why? What clearly cannot be reinforced frequently enough is that the real jewel is the sacrifice of inheritance, wealth and power. This sacrifice and the pursuit of the path of renunciation are the jewels that adorn the crown of Siddhartha.

The turban which Siddhartha deliberately threw away symbolized his rejection of his life as a prince—something that he considered as an obstacle on his path, a path that still enlightens ours. The sacrificed turban never fell down on the ground in the

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7.1 The topmost panel of the turban relic sculpture, depicting Siddhartha's turban being lifted to heaven. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.

7.2 Festivities around the relic of the turban, Phanigiri, c. late 2nd–3rd century AD (Satavahana period). Limestone; 150 (h) x 25 (w) x 20 (d) cm. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

Carvings depicting Siddhartha's turban sacrifice can be found at early Buddhist sites such as Bharhut and Sanchi, and in Gandhara and the Deccan.

7.3 Celestial dancers and devas celebrate at the shrine of Siddhartha's turban relic (Chaitya-Chuda Mani), detail from the corner pillar of the west gateway at Bharhut, 2nd century BC. Archival photograph. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

7.4 Worship of the bodhisatva's hair, depicted on the third panel on the inner face of the left pillar, detail from the southern gateway of Stupa 1, Sanchi, c. 1st century AD. Archival photograph. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

7.5 Siddhartha's turban being lifted up to heaven, detail from the stupa at Kanaganahalli, c. 2nd century BC. Courtesy Christian Luczanits, 2000 (CL00 35,03).

7.6 A temple or mansion for the worship of Siddhartha's turban relic (visible in the uppermost window), detail from the stupa at Kanaganahalli, c. 2nd century BC. Courtesy Christian Luczanits, 2000 (CL00 41,08).

7.7 and 7.8 The upper-third of the turban relic sculpture, shaped like a turban. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja. Unusual for a memorial pillar or stele, the representation of Siddhartha's crowning turban at Phanigiri is carved in the round. The jewel in the centre of his crown celebrates the sacrifice of his inheritance of kingship. In the 2017–18 *India and the World* exhibition at CSMVS Mumbai, this sculpture was placed in a gallery on Empire alongside portrait sculptures of grand Greek and Roman emperors like Alexander and Hadrian which can be seen in the background. It was used to make the point that in an age when portrait statues served statecraft and the aggrandizement of power, at least some public statues in India were made that celebrated the sacrifice of material wealth and power.

legend that the carving follows. It rose up, and up, and came to rest in the highest (33rd trayatrimsha) heaven where it was received by celestials and accorded the status of a holy relic. Various ancient texts tell us that the celebration of this turban became the focus of a festival for the gods in heaven.[3] In art and architecture, the earliest known representations of this scene that shows the turban (chuda) in heaven come from Bharhut and Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh, which are from the 2nd century BC and 1st century AD (figures 7.3 and 7.4). Later on, it was also depicted at Mathura, early and later-period Gandhara, Amaravati and Kanaganahalli (figures 7.5 and 7.6), amongst others.[4] None, however, are quite as spectacular as the sculpture from Phanigiri.

THE FORM AND METAPHOR OF ANOTHER TAJ

There is a profound shift in the nature of visual narration between the early sculptures made at the time of the Shungas in Bharhut in the 2nd century BC and those created under the Satavahanas and Kushanas in the 2nd century AD. The shift is marked by greater lyrical movement of figures that are presented in diverse compositional formats: circular tondos, long rectangular formats, panels with overlapping figural activity and space divided along dynamic diagonals. By the 3rd century AD, these compositions grow more crowded with smaller figures. An enormous wealth of detail can now be observed in the art—patterns on fabric, a diversity of headdresses, hairstyles, jewellery, furniture, trappings for horses and elephants, palatial interiors on the one hand, forest hermitages on the other. These details are enriching, as they are not merely representations of what society was like, but also of what it was capable of imagining. They also tell us much about the shifts in the religious and ritual context and a careful examination also reveals a tacit acknowledgement of the transcultural exchanges with the Roman, Mediterranean, Egyptian and Near Eastern worlds that had intensified since Mauryan times and had begun to make an impression in peninsular India nearly 200 years before the carvings of Phanigiri.

It is against this backdrop that the extraordinary sculpture of Siddhartha's sacrifice of the turban must be contextualized. As a sculpture, it is certainly unusual. Its upper third is carved in the round into a turban, intended to be seen from all sides, rather like some kind of pillar capital (figures 7.7 and 7.8). Its lower two-thirds, however, are in the shape of a fairly straightforward stele, intended primarily to be viewed frontally, but for the depictions of the worship of elaborately festooned pillars or stambhas that are carved on both the stele's sides (figures 7.9 and 7.10). We don't know what kind of pedestal it stood on, given that its lowest portion or base was never recovered in the excavation of the site. Nor do we know whether it faced the 48-pillared congregation hall or the octagonal-based shrine at Phanigiri, or the two apsidal chaitya shrines opposite it. It might have been removed from its original location in antiquity and placed in the spot where 21st-century excavators found it (figure 7.17). How do we then explain the function or use of this sculpture?

7.9 and 7.10 Carvings on the two sides of the turban relic sculpture. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
The right side shows an elaborate dharmachakra as the crowning element, thus referring to the Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath. The left has a pillar crowned with a stupa, which commemorates the Buddha's physical passing away (mahaparinirvana).

7.11 Memorial pillar dedicated to Vasishthiputra Pulumavi from Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, mid-3rd century AD. Courtesy Huntington Archive. © John C. and Susan L. Huntington.
The memorial pillar at Phanigiri may seem different from Mauryan pillars or from the commemorative one for this Satavahana king. Yet one can draw a connection on the grounds that they are all tall monolithic pillars with symbolic imagery which serve a ceremonial function at stupa sites.

While broader slabs may come from the drum of a stupa, where they were once slapped on to its body, narrow rectangular steles like this are usually thought to come from a vedika i.e. posts from the surrounding boundary fence around the stupa. However, this sculpture could not have performed either of those functions as its sides are carved, and there is no indication of a mortise in which the lenticular tenons of crossbars were normally socketed in Buddhist vedikas. Obviously, this was a free-standing piece.

A few sculpted reliefs from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda show five ayaka pillars at the entrance to a stupa, each topped with a turban (figures 7.12 and 7.13).[5] At times, ayaka pillars can even have pots of ashes or relics under them. This gives credence to the idea that pillars were thought of as memorials to people. The erection of a stambha or pillar as a memorial has a long history and has been called an "aiduka/eduka" or a "yupa" in several ancient Indian texts. Some of the earliest examples of memorial slabs in south India come from Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati during the reign of the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus and are thought to date to the mid-3rd century AD (figure 7.11). Called chhaya stambhas, they are tetragonal in section and are carved or inscribed free-standing limestone columns.[6] The practice spread widely across communities with a long history both before and after the appearance of these pillars in Buddhist contexts.[7] References to the yupa and eduka in ancient literature nearly always mention a flight of steps and terraces in the vicinity leading to several other terraces or bhumikas. This description is not unlike the arrangement found at Phanigiri.

Given also that the lower two-thirds of the sculpture is a type of narrative stele associated with commemorative sculptures, I think this stambha is akin to the so-called "hero stones" or memorial stelae that were erected in a similar format in many parts of South Asia. They too are largely intended to be viewed frontally, even though they are erected as free-standing pillars without any architectural edifice providing support. Thematically too, memorial stones commemorate the sacrifice of their heroes, similar to what we see in this sculpture.

The narrative of the stele unfolds upwards. Siddhartha is known to have first taken a decision to forsake his princely life, even his wife and child. He is said to have stolen away at night, and was divinely aided to do so. This is called the great departure (mahabhinishkramana). In the lower panel, Siddhartha is seen leaving the palace gates on his horse, Kanthaka. That it is at night is made clear by showing the path lit by a servant carrying a flaming torch before him (figures 7.15 and 7.16).

Above this, in the next scene, the Buddha-to-be appears to be bidding farewell to both Chhandaka, his groom whom he gazes down at, and the much-loved Kanthaka whose head can be seen in the crowd (figure 7.14). This is an incident that is communicated with much drama in the *Lalitavistara* and in the *Buddhacharita*. In these texts the emotional resolve of the monks and elegantly enthroned and haloed Siddhartha are contrasted with the wails and laments that come from the palace and the tears that Kanthaka sheds. The sculptor too relays the poignancy and drama of the scene through tremendous control and careful communication of facial expression, posture and gesture. One by one, the texts tell us, members of the entourage come to say goodbye.

The central panel of the sculpture shows Siddhartha seated without his turban. We cannot see him cutting his hair here—but it is shown in carvings at several other Buddhist sites and is so well known from texts that perhaps the artist assumed his

7.12 Sculpted relief from Nagarjunakonda showing ayaka pillars at the entrance to a stupa, each topped with a turban. Source: Monika Zin, "Heavenly Relics—The Bodhisatva's Turban and Bowl in the Reliefs of Gandhāra and Āndhra (including Kanaganahalli)", in *Indology's Pulse: Arts in Context*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2019. Photograph: Wogtek Oczkowski. Courtesy Monika Zin.

viewers would be familiar with it. Small variations in the imagery are to be expected from site to site. For instance, we cannot see in this relief, the ganas or atlas-like yakshas who symbolically lift Kanthaka by his hooves in the carvings found at other sites which communicate how silently the entourage left the palace. It may be, however, that they were carved at the bottom of this relief, but it cannot be proven as the lowest part of the stele is damaged.

The two festooned pillars carved on either side of the stele are not identical. The one on the sculpture's right has an elaborate dharmachakra as its ushnisha (see figure 7.9), which obviously refers to the first sermon at Sarnath. The one on the sculpture's left has a crowning element of a stupa (see figure 7.10), which recalls the master's physical passing (mahaparinirvana). Together, the three facets make up a narrative of renunciation (and entry into monkhood, or the sangha) as the first primary step undertaken on the path to the extolling of Dharma (the chakra or wheel) and the worship of relics of the Buddha, symbolized by the stupa.

A CROWN FORSAKEN

Sacrifice forms a consistent motif in the most popular Buddhist legends, be it the stories of the *Avadanas*, *Lalitavistara* or the *Jatakas*, and many of them like Vessantara, Anathapindaka, Mahakapi, Chhadanta or even the many sacrifices of Siddhartha (the Buddha-to-be) are depicted at stupas.[8] Cutting the hair as a symbol of self-sacrifice is a motif that goes back to Vedic sources: the *Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana*, for instance, says that the sacrificer's death is at the same time as his salvation, for gaining the true self is the reward of the sacrifice of bodily entrapment.

"They who take part in a sacrificial session (*sattra*) go to the world of heavenly light. They kindle (vivify) themselves with the initiations and cook (mature) themselves with the sacrificial séances. With two they cut off their hair (except the topknot), with two their skin, with two their blood, with two their flesh, with two their bones, with two their marrow. In the sacrificial session the Self is the guerdon (*atma-dakshinam*); verily receiving the Self as their guerdon, they go to the world of heaven. They cut off the topknot at last for success (*ridhhyai*), thinking, 'more quickly may we attain to the world of heaven.'"[9]

7.13 Stupa drum panel excavated from Nagarjunakonda Site 3, late 3rd century AD. ASI Archaeological Museum, Nagarjunakonda (Mus. No. 4). Photograph: John Guy, 2014. The panel shows five ayaka pillars on a platform above (implying behind) the Buddha. Each pillar seems to be topped by a turban.

7.14 Detail from the middle panel of the turban relic sculpture where the Buddha-to-be appears to be bidding farewell to his groom Chhandaka, and his horse Kanthaka, both of whom can be seen in the crowd. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

7.15 and 7.16 Details from the lowermost panel of the turban relic sculpture showing Siddhartha's departure from the palace at night, on his horse Kanthaka, and accompanied by servants, one of whom holds a flaming torch. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

The *Shatapatha Brahmana* also reveals that birth thus happens in debt to death (SB. III.6.2.16), and that transformation or rebirth is not merely physical but also symbolic, because of knowledge. Diksha or initiation therefore happens when the death of the former self has taken place. The metaphor that ran parallel to the investiture of the pagri or turban—of cutting off hair as a symbolic sacrifice for the former self to be able to enter a new path, especially one of education or knowledge—was thus well established in the centuries prior to its carving at Phanigiri.

The narrative which the sculpture appears to communicate is translated from the *Nidana-Katha* by Rhys Davids thus:[10] "These locks of mine are not suited for a mendicant. Now it is not right for anyone else to cut the hair of a future Buddha, so I will cut them off myself with my sword." Then, taking his sword in his right hand, and holding the plaited tresses, together with the diadem on them, with his left, he cut them off. So his hair was thus reduced to 2 inches in length, and curling from the right, it lay close to his head. It remained that length as long as he lived, and the beard the same. There was no need at all to shave either hair or beard anymore."

A more cynical view of the materialism that governs ties of familial love is embedded in the poetic rendition of this episode in the play *Buddhacharita*. The playwright Ashvaghosha's dramas had circulated widely across South Asia and Buddhist Central Asia by this stage. Canto 6 of the play, in which Chhandaka is sent back, provides the artistic re-enactment which takes us to the heart of the aesthetic milieu of this story. Some verses from Patrick Olivelle's translation:[11]

On reaching the forest, thanking Chhandaka the Bodhisatva says:
(Verse: 6.10)
One supports a son for family's sake,
one serves the father to get sustenance;
the world shows affection for a motive;
kinship cannot endure without a cause.

(Verses 6.13–14, 6.19–20)
Taking the shining gem from his head-dress,
a gem that performed the task of a lamp,
he stood there as he made his oration,
like Mount Mandara holding up the sun:

"With this gem, Chanda, you must pay
repeated homage to the king.
And beseech him without being diffident,
To relieve his anguish, using these words:…

"This was the firm resolution,
as you know of our ancestors;
do not grieve for me as I walk
on this path, my patrimony.

"For when a man passes away,
there are heirs to his wealth;
but heirs to dharma on this earth
are absent or hard to find."

(Verse 6.25)
When he heard these words of his,
Chanda, overcome by grief,
Folded his hands, and replied
In a voice choking with tears:…

Chhandaka then exhorts the Bodhisatva to reconsider his decision, and in the eleventh verse, says:
(Verse 6.35)
If, however, you have made up your mind
to abandon your father and kingdom,
Please don't abandon me, My Lord,
For your feet are my sole refuge.

Siddhartha explains to him in turn that even those who love each other are forced to separate by death, just as his own mother did.
(Verse 6.53)
After hearing these words of his,
Kanthaka, the best of steeds,
licked with his tongue the prince's feet,
and began to shed warm tears.

Thereafter, the Bodhisatva cut off his turban and hair with a sword taken from Chhandaka's hand:
(Verses 6.56–57)
Unsheathing the sword, dark as a lotus petal,
he cut his ornate head-dress along with the hair,
and threw it in the air, the cloth trailing behind—
it seemed he was throwing
a swan into a lake.

As it was thrown up, heavenly beings caught it
Out of reverence so they may worship it;
Throngs of gods in heaven paid it homage
With divine honors according to rule.

Besides literature and drama, this narrative of the turban sacrifice came to be widely represented in sculpture and was seen by devotees across the ancient Buddhist landscape. Monika Zin emphasizes the idea of associative thinking imbued in the Amaravati-style sculptures, whereby the viewer is forced to see a concealed meaning in these depictions.[12] We can undertake several levels of associative thinking fruitfully with the turban sculpture of Phanigiri. In an age of empires, when ideas of kingship were based on the assertion of power, this sculpture reveals a parallel concept from Indian philosophy that endorses the reverse view—of not holding on to power. This view has been explicated in many Indian texts: Yudhishthira's entire life in the *Mahabharata* is a veritable sermon on the tussle between the virtues of sacrifice and temporal power, and in what circumstances does the upholding of which virtues make for the correct interpretation of Dharma. Siddhartha fulfils a similar, more straightforward and powerful role in Buddhist

discourse and this forms the main metaphor that was apprehended by ancient visitors to Phanigiri.

The Phanigiri stele with its sequential scenes depicts a transformation—Siddhartha leaves the palace as a prince, to renounce his royal trappings and comfort, and adopts instead the garb of a wandering monk, a mendicant dependent on alms from forest-dwellers and city folk. The bowl and turban, two quotidian objects, used by the Buddha himself, became holy artefacts, objects of reverence and worship, and grew in importance as Buddhist art evolved, depicted as they were at many sites. This makes the narrative of the sculpture also one about the memorialization of relics and their veneration. The left side of the Phanigiri relief reaffirms this as it celebrates a stupa (a container of relics—bodily/corporeal or of other kinds).

The geography within which the complex at Phanigiri was built is also revealing. As a monastic site, Phanigiri was undoubtedly an important jewel, with about 150 monks (and nuns too, perhaps) resident on top of the hill alone, and several more who were visitors and would have come through the township below. The monastery sits on top of a rock massif in an agricultural setting which is surrounded by forests containing megalithic burial sites. It is not a suburban site on the fringe of a big city, as we like to imagine many a monastic settlement in ancient India. Megaliths, which are often located in the forested parts of Telangana and Andhra, were coterminous with Buddhist establishments. They were already around when stupas were being built no doubt, but we know that they were not immediately or totally supplanted by the interventions of Buddhist monks, who learnt to live alongside. The forest is essential for shramanas (monks) as revealed by the worldview of many Buddhist texts, one of which—the *Rashtrapalapariprichha*—is likely to have been composed in the very period when Phanigiri was being constructed.[13] And, rather like that text which reminds monks who wander the forests about their vows and inspires them with the exemplary stories of sacrifices made by Siddhartha, the turban sculpture serves a motivational purpose. With its strategic location and prominence within Phanigiri, it testifies in stone the questions that monks would have asked themselves, reinforcing their resolve to stick to the commitments they made upon ordainment to the sangha.

However, there is a second, more politically relevant, line of associative thinking for our times. *The Jewel in the Crown* was writer Paul Scott's fictional historical account of 1966, that was part of his set of four books called the Raj Quartet published by Heinemann. It was made into an exceptionally popular 14-episode television series in 1984 for Britain's ITV (Granada Productions). Its spectacular success has been much analysed and several commentators have concluded that it taps into a nostalgia for the British Empire's greatness, a reinvocation which tends to forget the atrocities and damage that Empire wreaked, leaving Britain with a type of nationalism that has prevented decolonization and is symptomatic of the sentiment that has driven the decision behind Brexit in recent times.[14]

While curating the exhibition *India and the World: A History in Nine Stories* in collaboration with the British Museum at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) in Mumbai in 2017, I was often asked if I would be getting the Indian treasures that lie in Britain for display in India? Questions were specifically asked if the British Museum would be lending Indian artefacts from Amaravati. What justification was there for not doing so? Little, some might say. However, the project was guided by the understanding that whereas there is still a lot of Indian art lying in India, there are many more historical objects from other parts of the world that

Indians seldom get to see unless they can afford to travel abroad. Getting the British Museum to provide loans of artefacts from countries other than India would provide a chance to open the Indian mind to these artefacts from world history. This was a more progressive course of action, based on the wisdom that one cannot undo history and it is thus better to find productive ways of remembering the past while moving ahead. The centuries-old loss of material inheritances from colonized countries should open pathways for present-day scholars, visitors and enthusiasts to enjoy the fruits of that sacrifice: a capacity to share in the building of a new knowledge of the world, to participate in mutually beneficial exchanges that will enable institutions in countries like India to improve their efforts in the field of conservation, museum and exhibition design, and the dissemination of information and insights gathered from fresh research on these historical artefacts.

This once broken sculpture from Phanigiri was therefore specially conserved and prominently displayed at the *India and the World* exhibition (figures 7.18 and 7.19), signalling that attention needs to be paid to excavation, heritage management and art-historical pedagogy in lesser-known sites with hidden gems and emerging discoveries. Videos about the piece that played at the exhibition were further circulated on YouTube and journalists reported on the important nature of the piece and the need to focus on spaces such as Phanigiri.[15] At the same time, by drawing comparisons with Amaravati, the sculpture highlighted how the narrative of "decolonization" has become urgent in Western museums. This latter quest requires, first, an admission to the public of the history of the provenance of objects—how they came to be owned by museums, what factors shaped their identity, what they have meant in different times to different groups. This knowledge should then be encapsulated and shared with countries that were colonized, or are at the other end of the iniquitous racial, economic and global power dynamics. Only once this is admitted can institutions really work together on travelling exhibitions, discussions on better curation and administration of museums, and publications for knowledge dissemination. The inclusion of the turban sculpture from Phanigiri in an international exhibition thus performed a role of multilayered significance.

A JEWEL GIVEN FOR DIKSHA

Not unlike the fate of the famed Amaravati sculptures, the ones at Phanigiri have not been taken seriously enough. Many recovered sculptures at the site museum lie shattered in smithereens while other broken pieces are with the Department of Heritage Telangana and the State Museum in Hyderabad (figures 7.20–7.22). There is now an urgent need to train researchers in the art history of the region and put these scattered fragments together with the help of conservators so that they can be preserved and displayed at a much-needed museum in Phanigiri. The depth of research will determine the decisions taken on how the history of such a site will be told to future generations. There is therefore some poignancy to the turban relief sculpture. In it, Siddhartha exhorts us that it is only by sacrificing something that something new can be learnt, that material inheritance is only transitory, and one must move towards a path of spiritual knowledge and nirvana instead. Phanigiri can open a door for necessary collaborations with museums all over the world that would be invested in helping the team rebuild and restore the site to the glory it deserves.

Amaravati, we noted above, has formed a benchmark for many reasons. Yet barring Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, the rest of the Buddhist sites of Andhra and Telangana have not been given much scholarly attention throughout the 20th century

From discovery, to conservation and display: while some objects like this stele have been restored, several other objects still require restoration.

7.17 The turban relic sculpture in-situ during excavations, found in various broken fragments. Courtesy Catherine Becker.

7.18 Conservation work being carried out on the turban relic sculpture as it was restored for the *India and the World* exhibition at CSMVS, Mumbai, in 2017–18. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

7.19 The turban relic sculpture, prominently displayed at the *India and the World* exhibition at CSMVS, Mumbai, in 2017–18. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.

7.20–7.22 Fragments from Phanigiri, including Buddhapadas, portions of the famous torana, broken heads of the Buddha and bodhisatvas, inscriptions and smaller pots and clay objects carefully stored at the site by the Department of Heritage Telangana. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.
As artefacts like these continue to be excavated, they signal the scope for future research and conservation that can be done at Phanigiri.

despite every possible facility being potentially available in the last few decades, and despite the Archaeological Survey of India and Andhra Pradesh State Archaeology Department having undertaken extensive surveys to record more than 100 Buddhist remains in the lower Krishna and Godavari valleys. Several scholars, including Robert Knox, Upinder Singh and Akira Shimada, have documented the lamentable stories of the 200 years of neglect and consequent depredations that the celebrated site of Amaravati faced because of an apathetic government and a completely indifferent public/electorate.[16] If anything, the ruin of a built-up site as rich as Amaravati should hold lessons for us at Phanigiri. Besides, bringing attention to an extraordinary site in Telangana boosts the profile of the state. The objects from the site may be fewer in number than Amaravati, but they are exceptionally fine in quality, bestowing on the Government of Telangana a more manageable responsibility for their maintenance.

The treasures of Phanigiri also need to be better protected and saved from pilfering, which has been an old problem at many of these sites. Upinder Singh rightly notes that, "ironically, the documentation, exploration and excavation of the *mahachaitya* of Amaravati was accompanied by its steady disappearance."[17] Similarly, soon after the excavation of the sculpture that is the focus of this chapter, it too was

stolen from Phanigiri hill, adding an interesting twist to the narrative of this object. The police finally recovered it in October 2003 and deposited it with the State Museum, Hyderabad. There, to secure it, it was embedded in concrete! In the 1990s, even as the British Museum was building a special gallery with an arid climate in which Amaravati sculptures could be best preserved, the ones in the Chennai Government Museum were getting damaged because they had been embedded in cement walls which would gather damp for four months every year (figure 7.23). It took decades of complaints, petitions from specialists and shaming in the press for new refurbished galleries to be eventually created for these sculptures. The ASI has since learnt that embedding sculptures into cement walls or pedestals is a practice that needs to be reversed at museums across India, not only because of the damage concrete can cause, but because it prevents the object from being loaned or moved for exhibitions. The exhibition in Mumbai provided an opportunity to repair and conserve the object.

The turban sculpture from Phanigiri was used in the *India and the World* exhibition not just for its beauty but also because it served as a metaphor for the "Jewel in the Crown". Amaravati's sculptures are a jewel in the crown of the British Museum, their ownership based on appropriation by colonial officials. The museum has

therefore often been concerned that India might make a claim for their repatriation. To prevent such a claim from gaining substance, they have focused on looking after these sculptures in the best possible way as they have to be seen as an institution that ensures that they are well displayed and available to all visitors. The museum needs to be also seen as sharing its cultural assets with those countries from which the objects it owns have been removed: major loan exhibitions like *India and the World* are a step in that direction. It also trains the staff of museums and cultural sites in India and other such countries, and directly helps with the conservation of spaces such as Amaravati. It has consistently carried on with work in these areas since the early 1990s, reaffirming its responsibility and capability to hold on to these objects. Equally, this also exposes the other side of the argument: if sites cannot be protected or conserved properly in India, and if its standards of curatorial care for objects are poor, then they should be retained by those that can do right by them.

Materialistically thought, the turban sculpture's narrative performs a role not dissimilar to that of other ancient tales that stressed the virtues of making donations. The famous story of Anathapindaka is probably most representative in this regard. Anathapindaka, a merchant, gave a substantial gift, relinquishing his wealth for the purchase of land needed by the sangha. Personal property was given up for the collective good, and the sangha took charge of community welfare and knowledge formation and dissemination, something that is today fulfilled through exposure to these tales and objects at museums, heritage sites and universities, and via books and media. The pedagogical tasks of these institutions remain important. Each age and constituency will have its own priorities and will no doubt need access to these objects in order to reassess them and make them relevant to their own times. The quality of the carving of the turban relief and its core narrative, however, will forever remind us that something had to be given up to gain something else instead. And because what was sacrificed was not small, it will push us to make the gains count.

WHO CLAIMS THE SACRIFICE?

The narratives we build around a heritage site appeal to specific audiences. They have to be inclusive so as to maximize the stakeholders in the maintenance of that heritage: in this regard, some important lessons can be learnt from history. In the 250 years since its original rediscovery, the despoliation of Amaravati in the name of efforts to salvage, preserve and revivify the site make for one of the most valuable case studies on the subject of heritage and culture management in modern history. There is everything to be found in this tale: abject neglect of the site, disregard for its priceless carvings, and the earnest repeated pleas of scholars to an all-too-apathetic and slow British (and later, Indian) bureaucracy to initiate a rescue mission. Patient documentation through handmade sketches of the site as it was 200 years ago are today augmented by complex contemporary worldwide digitization projects[18] and this can tell us how collaborative research can be brought to bear on other sites in India as well. The multiple excavations, each one seeking to enhance the knowledge or remedy the gaps left by previous groups, must be read alongside stories of the advances made in conservation technology, the politics of ownership and now, growing claims for repatriation from Western collections. While the claimants of the sacrificed site may have been historians, antiquarians and museums in the past, Amaravati has gained a new impetus post 2006, when the Dalai Lama performed the Kalachakra ceremony there, and the state government made a strong effort to turn it into a Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism attraction.

Today, there are several stakeholders with differing views about the sacred geography of Buddhism. Sites like Sarnath and Bodhgaya are utterly transformed by what pilgrimage tourism has done to their environments. Scholars have, in more recent decades, been studying the motivations for heritage tourism and Buddhist religious pilgrimage to ancient holy sites in India.[19] Besides Bodhgaya and Sarnath, various places in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have been added to this network, attracting local and international visitors. More than ten Buddhist countries have sponsored the construction of temples and monasteries at each of these sites, providing amenities for pilgrims of their nationalities. Even as the Indian Railways runs its Mahaparinirvan Express through part of this Buddhist circuit, states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have been asking for their sites to also be included in its longer circuit. Catherine Becker has documented the conscious approaches being taken since the mid-1990s by the agencies of the government to promote Buddhist tourism and the protection of this heritage of Andhra and Telangana. Pamphlets lead visitors to new museums, which oftentimes contain objects from older museums but are merely sacrificed from those Departments of Archaeology to Departments of Tourism instead. Her study shows how new narratives are spun around these Buddhist remains; these are directed at both domestic and international consumers by suggesting that a version of the past that is mystical and transformative is still accessible in Andhradesha.[20]

Is this attention by the state also for the sake of the urban middle classes of India who in the past two decades have become not insubstantial followers of the Japanese tradition of Soka Gakkai International?[21] Unlikely, as that isn't a large enough demographic, and the policies supporting the revival of Buddhist sites have an older history than the popularity of Soka Gakkai in India. Was this development ushered in in appeasement of Tibetan refugees and the minority community of Buddhist residents in Sikkim and the other northeastern states? Were the concerns of post-Ambedkar Dalit Buddhists considered when revitalizing these sites? Scholars who have analysed the contemporary practice of Buddhism in India and the compulsions of two of the largest Buddhist communities—the Tibetan Buddhists and the Dalits—have argued that there are barely any convergences in the social circumstances of the two communities nor in how they practise Buddhism. In all these years, these two groups have rarely found any common meeting ground; yet, both value the same historical sites as places of pilgrimage.[22] However, there is another dimension to the development of Buddhist heritage sites in India which can be taken back to the older Nehruvian attempt to develop Buddhism as a neutral, non-confrontational, safe and symbolic alternative for the visual culture of the Indian state in the mid-20th century. The Mauryan lion capital at Sarnath and the dharmachakra were selected as symbols of India and transmitting the message of ahimsa was said to guide India's foreign policy in all four directions.[23] Is it this latter reason that still seeks a return to the core Buddhist value of ahimsa even today? Or, is it for the more pragmatic economic gain that tourism yields with whatever spin this may require?

Mostly, the narrative that is spun is of religiosity. While the Buddhist sites in Andhra are in varying states of ruin, visual and rhetorical devices have been employed in tourism brochures to make claims of enlightenment. Several of these brochures appear to be directed at the global Buddhist community. This became particularly obvious in the period leading up to the 30th Kalachakra ceremony which drew close to one lakh pilgrims from all over the world to Andhra Pradesh. The centre of the initiation was merely a five-minute walk from the Amaravati stupa.

Major funding for the initiation was provided by the Busshokai Centre in Japan, whereas the responsibility of organizing the events was shared by the Norbulingka Institute in Dharamshala and the state government of Andhra Pradesh. While the former handled the logistics for the event, the state authorities, predominantly from the Guntur district, assisted with the infrastructure.

Pilgrimage tourism thus also requires ritual, and now the state finds itself participating in more religious activity than it has otherwise been involved in—a responsibility that is always difficult to sustain in a multi-faith society like India where favours granted by the agencies of the state to any one community are then demanded by others too. This provokes the state to evaluate what is going to be the nature of the protection of the site and the uses it will be put it to. The promotion of the site only through its erstwhile Buddhist glory is problematic because the people who live there aren't Buddhist. The apparatus of the state would then be catering to an alien population who will be valued locally only for their economic contributions and not respected for their faith.[24] Besides, should the state be promoting religious pilgrimage at all?

In this context, it is necessary to recognize that there are no hard boundaries between pilgrims and tourists, given that it has often been noted that for vast numbers of people a connection with the sacred happens while on a holiday or a visit to a locale away from home. Places "elsewhere", espousing a faith not necessarily one's own, offer a panacea, an exit from the mired present of home. The spiritual benefit

7.23 The old Amaravati gallery at the Chennai Museum. Photograph: Takashi Koezuka.
While demands for repatriation and narratives that lead toward a "decolonization" of foreign museums gain ground, we must also consider the fate of sites and museums in India where precious objects lie in a state of utter neglect. For instance, Amaravati's priceless sculptures lay embedded in the damp concrete walls of the Madras Museum for decades, till the authorities were pressured to rehouse them in a new gallery to rescue them from further damage.

of tourism cannot be denied, and it need not be denounced either. At the same time, the sustainable protection of any site depends on its continuing relevance to multiple stakeholders who will each have different priorities and identities, making it prudent for the state to try and cover as many agendas as possible; religiosity is only one such storyline. A larger narrative must be built for Phanigiri that considers the protection of the landscape in which it exists—the habitats it has supported and has been supported by. This will aid the writing of a history of climate, land-use and forestry in the region—matters which will only become more relevant given the precarious nature of our times and the fragile nature of our ecosystems.[25]

Serpents, yakshas and trees have found a place in Buddhist worship and iconography since its early days, and this formula holds significance even now. Days before the Kalachakra initiation of 2006, the Dalai Lama planted a sapling of the bodhi tree at Amaravati. With this, the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation launched the Buddhavanam project, also called the Sriparvata Arama. Sprawled across 279 acres of land, the Buddhavanam when complete is meant to include several gardens, a central stupa (which would be a replica of the main stupa at Amaravati) and a meditation centre surrounding this centrepiece. A museum dedicated to Buddhism, along with an interpretation centre will be housed in the replica stupa. This plan also sets aside land for the future, should foreign monasteries wish to build their temples there, such as those at Bodhgaya.[26]

The value of the heritage of Phanigiri does not merely lie in its possession of some of ancient India's finest sculptures; it also contains early lessons about ecological living and learning to value resources provided by waterbodies and forests. In recent decades, this region has come to be associated with intensive agriculture, mining and exploitative labour systems. But due to its mineral and geologically rich territories, the region has not had to be dependent on external resources. Despite the poverty brought on by modern-day wage and access discrepancies, those who live and work here still attempt to carve out sustainable livelihoods for themselves and for the area in which an elaborate edifice has rested for so long. It is this aspect of environmental wellbeing and harmonious living that needs showcasing in the development of the site when addressing how and to whom Phanigiri will be made to appeal, and who will be entrusted with its safety and upkeep.

The contemporary culture of spectacle enabled by our museums, which harness the power of digital and other technologies of simulation, will no doubt create a hyperreal heritage site. This must have relevance to the people who live in Phanigiri as much as it does to those who speak English, Tibetan or Japanese, which is a model India knows well from the other sites that have uncritically accepted a revitalization through religious tourism or pilgrimage. The danger of making the local specificity of the place redundant is always high when heritage development takes place to attract people from outside.

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To summarize, this essay has studied a sculpture from Phanigiri to discuss its meaning, context, the state of the site it comes from and what needs to be kept in mind as sculptures like it are put back together. I have tried to place it in the larger context of the site and Buddhist architectural history, use its form and depictions to unravel the many meta-narratives it contains, and also throw light on what purpose it may have originally served. While the scene of the bodhisatva's turban sacrifice finds representation across several ancient Buddhist sites, in this essay,

I have attempted to show how the Phanigiri relief is unique. Since the stele bears resemblance to structures such as memorial pillars, edukas, ayakas and hero stones, it raises questions about whether the sculpture commemorates a specific Buddhist donor or celebrates the memory or diksha (initiation) of a particular person? Some questions like this remain, while there are still others which the narrative of the sculpture has provoked.

This connects with the second aim of the essay, which has been to build on the message of the sculpture; that sacrifice paves the way for enlightenment. This enables us to take historical losses or ruptures in our stride and look toward the long-term positive transformations they may yield. In the ancient context, the message of Siddhartha's renunciation of material wealth must have been a powerful one for the people of Phanigiri. Similarly, the Phanigiri turban sculpture continues to speak to us in modern times, reminding us to not be in the thrall of materiality. It also urges us to look beyond debates around colonization and repatriation and imagine a shared future of conservation and productive reuse of heritage. This entails the responsibility of knowledge building and sharing of historical assets across cultures. This larger business of heritage also leads to questions of how the site ought to be preserved, and for whom it needs to be revived.

From the very beginning of this book, we noted the natural surroundings that have nurtured the communities of the region since ancient times. The megalithic burial sites discovered at nearby Bhongir and the water reservoirs and forest lands attest to how nature has shaped cultures and impacted the spread of Buddhism in the Deccan hinterland. A symbiotic relationship with the landscape was built as the monks who were dependent on these resources for their food and medicines harnessed them to build semi-urban centres visited by the laity and urban traders. They moulded the landscape in many parts of South Asia through irrigation systems for paddy cultivation and we must study Phanigiri to see if similar control was exercised here.[27] These considerations of landscape archaeology can provide insights and interpretations of the site that will appeal to a wider body of stakeholders rather than only pilgrim tourists, and extend its relevance beyond tourism and heritage management to other departments of state administration (including forestry, agriculture, irrigation). It will also encourage researchers to explore Buddhist sites, faith and practice from new ecological perspectives.

In this essay, we have also looked at passages from popular ancient Buddhist texts that reminded the monkhood about the value of the vows of sacrifice they had taken. Monasteries like these taught them to live on alms and maintain frugality and yet remain uncompromising in their quest for peace and enlightenment. Leaving behind home and family and adopting a new life, each of them came with a weight of stories and memories. The turban sculpture at Phanigiri, which gives an iconic space to the act of casting away an older life, would have been reassuring and reaffirmed the necessity of this change as a step towards rebirth and the real wealth of knowledge. If we return to the central scene of the stele, one sees that Siddhartha's action of renouncing earthly pleasures and duties was not uniformly welcomed by those who loved him. Looking carefully, we spot two figures standing beside the prince as he throws away his turban. One accepts the decision with folded hands; the other hides his face in disbelief (figure 7.24). It is the latter's reaction that lends the moment dramatic gravity. And it is through him that we realize that what the prince was leaving behind was not small. Phanigiri provides us with an invitation to transform that tragedy of sacrifice into a reassuring story of adopting a new path.

7.24 Detail from the central panel of the turban relic sculpture. Courtesy Naman P. Ahuja.
The panel shows two figures standing beside Siddhartha as he throws away his turban. One accepts the decision with folded hands while the other hides his face in disbelief. Their reactions symbolize the gravity of the prince's sacrifice.

ENDNOTES

1 There is surprisingly scant information available on the specific ritual incantations involved in the many investiture rituals that accompanied the donning of a pagri in ancient times. We can of course study the more modern dastar-bandi in Punjab, conducted as a coming-of-age ceremony for Sikh boys, the rasam-pagri when a man becomes the head of a family on an elder's death, and also various pattabhisheka ceremonies in Hindu ritual contexts for idols, pontiffs and royals for an ethno-archaeological approach to the subject.

2 Legend has it that on the Buddha's death, his relics were divided into eight portions, one set of which was claimed by the nagas and interred in a stupa called Ramagrama. Years later, when the emperors Ajatashatru and subsequently Ashoka reclaimed all the relics in order to subdivide them, the nagas refused to part with theirs. Several authors in this volume have alluded to the recurrence of the representations of serpents at Phanigiri as well as at other sites in this region. An assessment of the association of the Satavahanas, the stupa and the region with the nagas has been recently evaluated in Monika Zin, "The Buddha's Relics and the Nāgas: An Attempt to Throw Light on Some Depictions in the Amaravati School", in *South Asian Archaeology and Art 2012*, Vol. 2, edited by V. Lefèvre, A. Didier and B. Mutin, Turnhout: Brepols, 2016, pp. 757–76.

3 Ibid. Zin relies on textual sources gathered by H. Lüders in her essay "Heavenly Relics—The Bodhisatva's Turban and Bowl in the Reliefs of Gandhāra and Āndhra (including Kanaganahalli)", in *Indology's Pulse: Arts in Context. Essays Presented to Doris Meth Srinivasan in Admiration of her Scholarly Research*, edited by Gerd J.R. Mevissen and Corinna Wessels-Mevissen, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2019, pp. 365–78. She lists the citations, "According to Lüders (1963:94): *Nidānakathā*, I:64f; *Mahāvastu*, II:165f; *Lalitavistara*, 225; Chin. *Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra*, and in *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*;…in these latter texts it is added that on the anniversary of the event thirty-three gods celebrate the festival of the hair lock." It is worth quoting the *Lalitavistara* passage which mirrors the emotion captured by the sculpture fairly closely. "After reaching the forest, the Bodhisatva was welcomed by a great crowd of nagas, gandharvas, yakshas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras and great serpents, whom he dismissed. It occurred to him then, 'I shall send back these ornaments and Kanthaka with Chhandaka.' Chhandaka did so, and the place where they were kept became a chaitya called Chhandaka-nivartana. Thereafter, the Bodhisatva thought, 'How can a crown (go with) asceticism?' He cut of his crown with his sword, which went into the sky. To this day, a festival of the crown is celebrated among the Trayatrimsha gods at the chaitya they created for this, called the Chuda-pratigrahana. And then, a Devaputra (in some Theravada texts Indra) disguised as a hunter came before him in old, ochre-coloured robes, which the Bodhisatva exchanged for his white robes. The discarded fine royal robes were taken to heaven by Devaputra, interred in a chaitya called Kashaya-grahana." Translation from Bijoya Goswami, *Lalitavistara: English Translation with Notes,* Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2001, pp. 212–13.

4 Zin, "Heavenly Relics", pp. 365–78. Monika Zin has undertaken an important study compiling all the known depictions of this story.

5 This needs to be assessed very carefully. Ayaka pillars are sometimes shown to be topped with chaitya arches which,

given the small size of the carvings and their weathered conditions, can be mistaken for turban tops. On careful examination, Monika Zin has suggested one instance of turban tops from Nagarjunakonda (Ibid., 374–75). To this, one may add, Robert Knox, *Amaravati: Buddhist Sculptures from the Great Stūpa,* London: British Museum Press, 1992, pp. 149, 151. Knox says Amaravati has ayaka pillars with crowns, not specifying whether they are crowning chaityas or turbans. The Phanigiri sculpture seems to be an exceptional survivor (in stone) of a practice of dressing pillars with real turbans.

6 Four studies of the material, both archaeological and textual are useful: H. Sarkar, "The Chaya-sthambhas from Nagarjunakonda", in *Memorial Stones: A Study of Their Origin, Significance and Variety*, edited by S. Settar and G. Sontheimer, Dharwad: Institute of Art History, Karnataka University, 1982, p. 200; F.R. Allchin, "Sanskrit 'Eḍūka'—Pāli 'Eluka'", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1/3 (1957), pp. 1–4; Pratapaditya Pal, "The Aiduka of the Visnudharmottarapurana and Certain Aspects of Stupa Symbolism", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. 4 (1971–72), pp. 49–62 and pl. VIII and IX; Hans T. Bakker, "Monuments to the Dead in Ancient North India", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 11–47.

7 Citations to pillars as memorials, the Buddhist eduka, are provided in note 6 *supra.* Several of these ideas had been noted previously in John Irwin, "The Axial Symbolism of the Early Stūpa: An Exegesis", in *The Stūpa: Its Religious, Historical and Architectural Significance*, edited by A.L. Dallapiccola and S. Lallement, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980, pp. 12–38. Also see John Irwin, '"Aśokan' Pillars: A Reassessment of the Evidence", *The Burlington Magazine,* Vol. 115, No. 848 (November 1973), pp. 706–20. Part II: "Structure" (December 1974); Part III: "Capitals" (October 1975); Part IV: "Symbolism" (November 1976). Continuing on the memorial role of these structures, Madeleine Biardeau's study on the worship of posts/pillars in Andhra and Orissa in the 1970s may specifically have been to understand goddesses. However, this remarkable study linked the ancient practice of sacrificial posts or yupas in Vedic texts to the delicate and perennial dialogue between the Sanskritic and the tribal: Madeleine Biardeau, *Stories About Posts: Vedic Variations around the Hindu Goddess*, translated by A. Hiltebeitel, J. Walker and M. Reiniche, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

8 Perhaps the most comprehensive studies on sacrifice as a motif in Buddhism have been conducted by Reiko Ohnuma: *Head, Eyes, Flesh and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Buddhist Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Phyllis Granoff, "The Sacrifice of Manicuda: The Context of Narrative Action as a Guide to Interpretation", in *Kalyana-Mitta: Professor Hajime Nakamura Felicitation Volume*, edited by V.N. Jha, New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991, pp. 225–39, examines the Buddhist avadana story of Manichuda, the blessed one born with the jewel in his crest which he sacrifices. She correlates the story to similar stories in Jain and Hindu literature which provide a rich history of the motif of sacrifice and its connection with expiation. Daniel Boucher, "Sacrifice and Asceticism in Early Mahayana Buddhism", in *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond, Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle*, edited by Steve Lindquist, London and New York: Anthem Press, 2013, pp. 197–223, does not dwell on expiation/repentance but the societal questions that arise in a widespread milieu of renunciation.

9 Ananda Coomaraswamy was taken by

the motif of self-sacrifice in ancient Indian texts: see Coomaraswamy, "Ātmayajña: Self-Sacrifice", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3/4 (February 1942), pp. 358–98. This rather curiously overlooked study relates the philosophical exegeses to material manifestations, the making of mimetic effigies or substitutes for the sacrificed. He draws allusions in Vedic texts to how the sacrifice of the turban (ushnisha) vanquishes soma (the self) and develops the idea that the greedy mind or appetitive soul are the sacrifice. This motif is repeated in various texts, including: H. Oertel, "Jaiminīya or Talavakara Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa: Text, Translations, and Notes", *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 16 (1896), p. 170; A.B. Keith, *The Veda of the Black Yajus School: Entitled Taittiriya Sanhita, Translated from the Original Sanskrit Prose and Verse*, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 19, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914, p. 608; *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa: According to the Text of Mādhyandina*, translated by J. Eggeling, in the *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLIV, edited by F. Max Muller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885, p. 152. The richest collection of references that analyse this motif in Sanskrit texts remains: Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud, *Le Sacrifice dans l'Inde ancienne*, Bibliotheque de' École des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences Religieuses, Vol. LXXIX, Paris: Presses Universities de France, 1976, and Sylvain Lévi, *La Doctrine du Sacrifice dans les Brahmanas*, Bibliotheque de' École des Hautes Etudes, Section de Sciences Religieuses, Vol. LXXIII, 2nd edition, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966.

10 T.W. Rhys Davis, *Buddhist Birth-Stories*, translated from Prof. V. Fausböll's edition of the Pali text, London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd and New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., p. 86. The date of the *Nidana-Katha* is uncertain, but was a biography of the Buddha most likely authored after the sculpture was made at Phanigiri?

11 *Life of the Buddha by Ashva.ghosha*, translated by Patrick Olivelle, from the Clay Sanskrit Library series, New York: NYU Press and JJC Foundation, 2008, pp. 163, 165–67, 171, 177–79.

12 Zin, "Heavenly Relics", p. 374.

13 For the *Rashtrapalapariprichha,* see Chapter 2 of Daniel Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest and the Formation of the Mahāyāna: A Study and Translation of the Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛchhā-sūtra*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008 (Indian reprint by Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2011).

14 On the familiar ruse of the repatriation of the Kohinoor, see Radhika Santhanam "The Kohinoor is but One Flashy Stone", *The Hindu,* April 22, 2016, https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-kohinoor-is-but-one-flashy-stone-says-naman-ahuja/article8505298.ece. On researching the employment of nostalgia as a rhetorical device in contemporary political cultures, Sophie Gaston says that, specifically with regard to the referendum campaign on the Brexit decision, "Empire and English identity formed two important—if not exhaustive—elements of the campaign's messaging." (p. 49) Apart from broadcast and digital media, 3,300 articles came out in the print media alone that specifically reinvoked the Empire and the glory days of WW II in Britain in the run up to the Brexit referendum. She concludes, "These narratives are being skilfully harnessed by insurgent politicians of varied ideological inclinations to galvanise a force of protest against the status quo, rejecting a vision for the future that positions citizens as passive in the process of change." (pp. 305–06) Sophie Gaston (and Sacha Hilhorst), *At Home in One's Past: Nostalgia as a Cultural and Political Force in Britain, France and Germany*, UK:

Demos, 2018, https://www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/At-Home-in-Ones-Past-Report.pdf. Another example of this critique is in Seumas Milne, "Britain: Imperial Nostalgia", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2005, https://mondediplo.com/2005/05/02empire. For a recent study of the "jewel in the crown" as a metaphor for this present nostalgia, see Bilal Qureshi, "The Original Brexit: Rediscovering *The Jewel In The Crown*", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Fall 2017), pp. 59–64, https://fq.ucpress.edu/content/ucpfq/71/1/59.full.pdf, and Amit Chaudhuri, "'Did the Empire Do Any Good?' British TV is Revising India's History. Again", *The Guardian*, October 13, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/13/empire-british-tv-india-dan-snow-jeremy-paxman. (All links in this note were accessed on March 15, 2020.)

15 I've published this object twice previously. Naman P. Ahuja, *The Body in Indian Art and Thought*, Antwerp: Ludion, 2013. However, the conservation status of the object was not good enough for it to travel for that international exhibition. It was consolidated and repaired for exhibition three years later: Naman P. Ahuja and J.D. Hill, *India and the World, A History in Nine Stories,* New Delhi: Penguin, 2017. In the public media, see Reema Gehi, "Small Talk: Rest is History", *Mumbai Mirror,* December 10, 2017, https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/others/sunday-read/small-talk-rest-is-history/articleshow/62004424.cms. The podcast "India & the World with Curator Naman Ahuja in Conversation with James Cuno" by Getty Art + Ideas can be accessed at http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/india-the-world-with-curator-naman-ahuja/. (All links in this note were accessed on March 15, 2020.)

16 Knox, *Amaravati*; Upinder Singh, "Amaravati: The Dismembering of the Mahācaitya (1797–1886)", *Journal of the Society for South Asian Studies*, Vol. 17, 2001, pp. 19–40; Akira Shimada, "Discovery of the Amaravati Stūpa: Early Excavations and Interpretations", in *Amaravati: The Art of an Early Buddhist Monument in Context*, edited by Akira Shimada and Michael Willis, London: British Museum Press, 2016, pp. 1–11.

17 Singh, "Amaravati", p. 19.

18 http://worldcorpusamaravati.com/ (accessed on September 23, 2020) is a website that aims to record digitized material on the Amaravati stupa. Scholars such as Jennifer Howes have also worked on the subject. See Howes, "The Colonial History of Sculptures from the Amaravati Stupa", in *Buddhist Stupas in South Asia: Recent Archaeological, Art-historical, and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Jason Hawkes and Akira Shimada, New Delhi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 20–39.

19 David Geary, *The Rebirth of Bodh Gaya: Buddhism and the Making of a World Heritage Site*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2017; *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition,* edited by Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. On how these sites have been "reinvented" by modern Buddhists and non-Buddhists, see Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Among more focused studies on specific places, see David Geary, "Destination Enlightenment: Branding Buddhism and Spiritual Tourism in Bodhgaya, Bihar", *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (June 2008), pp. 11–14, and Jessica Marie Falcone, *Battling the Buddha of Love: A Cultural Biography of the Greatest Statue Never Built*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

20 Catherine Becker, *Shifting Stones, Shaping the Past: Sculptures from the Buddhist Stūpas of Andhra Pradesh*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

7.25 Fragment found at Phanigiri. Courtesy Department of Heritage Telangana.
A variety of symbolic pillar capitals can be seen in Indian sculpture. In the top left section of this piece, we see a depiction of the Bodhisatva Mandhatar, modelled on the idea of the chakravartin, standing in front of a palace with free-standing pillars that have capitals in the shape of an auspicious shankha and padma. For further details, see figures 3.6 and 3.7 on p. 71. For details of other parts of this fragment, see figures 3.16 and 3.17 on pp. 78–79.

21 The sect's official Indian website (https://www.bharatsokagakkai.org/, accessed on September 23, 2020) gives an indication of its popularity and some statistics.

22 Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn*, and Upinder Singh, "Exile and Return: The Reinvention of Buddhism and Buddhist Sites in Modern India", *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (September 2010), pp. 193–217.

23 Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Return of the Buddha: Ancient Symbols for a New Nation*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2014.

24 The situation is not unlike what Falcone explains with reference to how a massive Maitreya statue intended at Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, could not be built because of the resistance from local farmers. This was despite the availability of huge sums of money for this project, pitting the needs of grassroots development against the lure of the deep pockets of transnational Buddhist pilgrimage.

25 Himanshu Prabha Ray: "From Multi-religious Sites to Mono-religious Monuments in South Asia: The Colonial Legacy of Heritage Management", in *The Routledge Handbook of Heritage in Asia,* edited by Patrick Daly and Tim Einter, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 69–84. Socially disengaged Buddhist tourism is a phrase Justin McDaniel has recently explored in his *Architects of Buddhist Leisure: Socially Disengaged Buddhism in Asia's Museums, Monuments, and Amusement Parks*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017.

26 The work being done by Amareswar Galla at the site of Amaravati and the nearby villages responds to many of these concerns. See Amareswar Galla, "Retaining Amaravati as a Heritage Town", *The Hindu*, September 13, 2015, https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/retaining-amaravati-as-an-ancient-town/article7646563.ece (accessed on September 23, 2020), and Galla, "Amaravathi Heritage Town—Reflections on the Historic Cultural Landscape Approach", in *Reshaping Urban Conservation: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach in Action*, edited by Ana Pereira Roders and Francesco Bandarin, Springer, 2019, pp. 79–90.

27 Iconography leaves little doubt that such relationships with older forest deities were incorporated into Buddhism. However, there are very few Buddhist sites that have been studied by landscape archaeologists to explore this larger symbiotic relationship. Some examples are: Robin Coningham and Prishanta Gunawardhana, *Anuradhapura,* Vol. III: The Hinterland, British Archaeological Reports, International Series, Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2013; Julia Shaw, "Stupas, Monasteries and Relics in the Landscape: Typological, Spatial, and Temporal Patterns in the Sanchi Area", in *Buddhist Stupas in South Asia*, edited by Hawkes and Shimada, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 114–45; Julia Shaw, "Landscape, Water and Religion in Ancient India", *Archaeology International*, Vol. 9 (2005), pp. 43–48.

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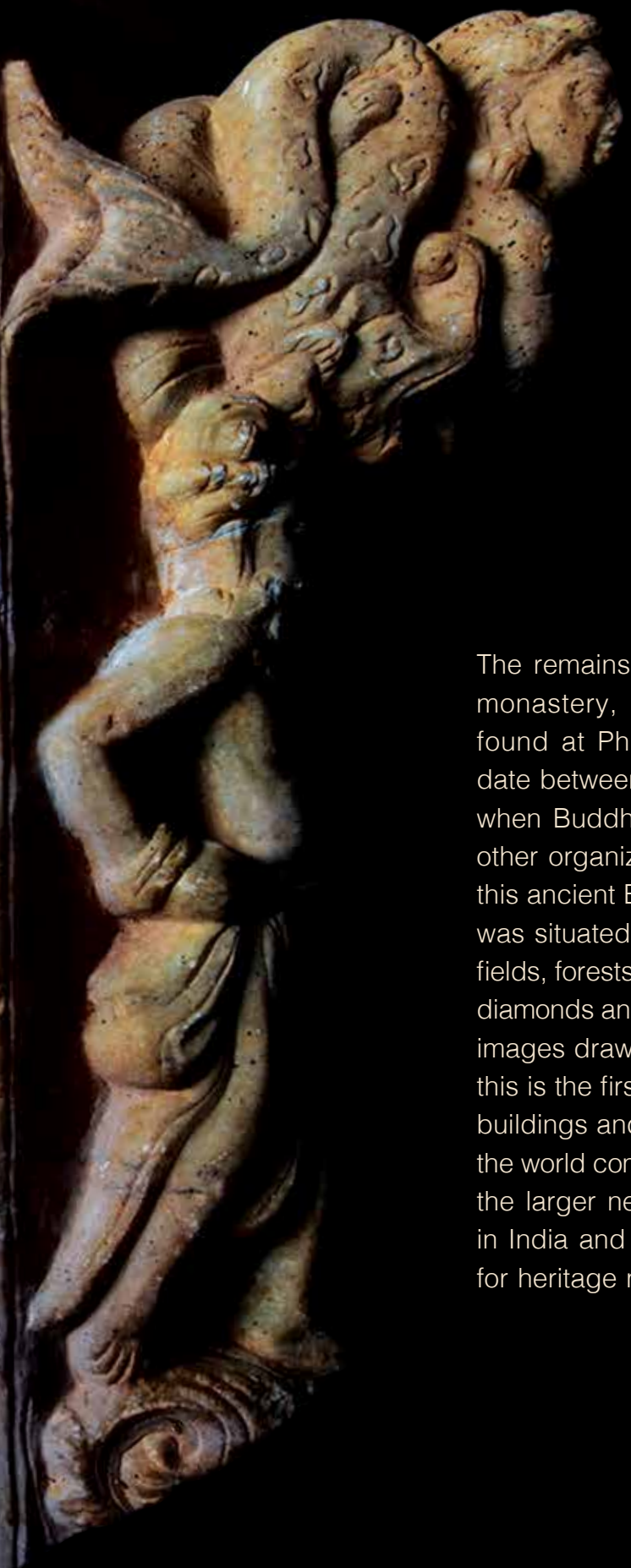

The remains of what must have been a jewel of a Buddhist monastery, perched high on a granite massif, have been found at Phanigiri, 150 km from Hyderabad. The remains date between the 2nd to 4th centuries AD—a decisive period when Buddhism was sharing space with a rising number of other organized sects. This book draws our attention to what this ancient Buddhist site looked like and the rich landscape it was situated in. The site is ringed with reservoirs, agricultural fields, forests and land mined for limestone and granite (and for diamonds and gold in antiquity). Bringing together research and images drawn from excavations carried out over six decades, this is the first comprehensive volume on the site's sculptures, buildings and inscriptions. Six leading specialists from across the world come together to assess Phanigiri's importance within the larger network of contemporaneous Buddhist complexes in India and Asia, and the lessons and opportunities it holds for heritage management and ecological living.

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